

consumer  
electronics



ceLifestyles.com

# Lifestyles™

## 2005 Holiday Buying Guide

Great Gifts For Everyone  
On Your List

What Your  
**KidS** Want

**HOT GIFTS**  
For Guys

**Best Bets:**  
MP3 Players  
& Digital  
Cameras

December 2005  
\$3.50 U.S. • \$4.99 Canada





Great theater deserves a great setting.



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The sleek, free-flowing lines of Sanus Platinum furniture reflect the beauty of today's digital televisions. And the newest addition, model PFFP flat panel TV stand, opens up possibilities to mount a flat panel television anywhere. An extruded aluminum column extends rigid strength from the steel-framed base to handle flat panel TVs up to 50". The Virtual Axis™ tilting system provides smooth motion with the touch of a fingertip. And features like a hidden cable channel, an adjustable glass shelf and a custom blended silver finish provide the perfect finishing touches to this innovative flat panel TV stand. So if your home theater is short on wall space, your options are now wide open.

**SANUS** | **SYSTEMS**

THE UNION OF FORM AND FUNCTION

800.359.5520 [www.sanus.com](http://www.sanus.com)



Great theater deserves a great setting.



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Plasma TVs are really making waves. So how do you choose a mount worthy of the splendor of a plasma TV? Easy. Choose a VisionMount™ flat panel TV wall mount from Sanus. Its simple elegance gives you one of the strongest, most durable mounts...with installation completed in just minutes. And the Virtual Axis™ mechanism allows you to adjust the tilt with an effortless fingertip touch...even if your TV weighs 175 pounds. So wherever your plasma TV is destined to be, VisionMount can easily handle your installation and positioning needs, and you can spend your time reflecting on the real beauty of your home theater.



VisionMount™ model VMPLb shown. Fits virtually any flat panel TV from 32" up to 60". Available in black and silver.

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# Life**styles**™

## feature topic

### Holiday Gift Guide

It's the age-old question that surfaces every year: How can I find the perfect gifts for my loved ones this holiday season? Often, it's difficult to know exactly what's hot and for whom, but you can bet that technology will be at the top of everyone's lists this year. Keep our holiday gift guide handy when you're doing your shopping, and you're sure to please even the greenest of Grinches on Christmas morning.

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## Open

There's always something new, interesting, and stylish happening in the world of consumer electronics. That's why the Open section packs the latest news and trends into the first few pages of *CE Lifestyles*, along with the sparkle and bling that you can buy to accessorize your devices.

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## A/V Club

Some of our favorite electronic gadgets are the ones that provide the sounds and pictures that move and entertain us and our friends and family. Whether you want to put together a wireless audio system for your home or just want help using the plasma TV in your living room, A/V Club can help.

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Play Your Christmas Carols



Installation by Electronics Design Group of Picataway, NJ  
[www.edgonline.com](http://www.edgonline.com)

## Digital Studio

Digital cameras and camcorders are changing the way we record the moments of our lives, from quick snapshots of favorite vacation spots to priceless video clips of first steps and other important milestones. Get to know your new digicam or camcorder and learn what to do with your photos and video once you have them.

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## CE @Home

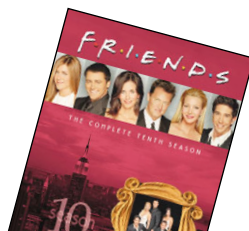
The consumer electronics in our homes are no longer limited to TVs and DVD players. Smart appliances, home automation, and whole-house audio systems are becoming more and more common and affordable for families, and with so much available, why check CE at the door?

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## CE Lite

Most CE devices are all about fun. Here, we'll tell you about the latest albums and films to catch, so you can make sure your entertainment is as up-to-date as your gear. Also, read what real women just like you are saying about how consumer electronics are affecting their everyday lives.

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## Editor's Note

I have to admit that I haven't always been gaga about the holidays. In fact, until a few years ago, I was downright Scroogy from November to January. But now, as I'm writing this, it's early October, and I'm already thinking of the gorgeous garland I'd like to use to decorate my home for Christmas.

What changed? I got married. We bought a house. And I have a brand-new niece. I'm nesting. All of this evokes in me feelings of incredible happiness, contentment, love, warmth, and all the other right things that we should associate with the holidays. These are also the best reasons to want to stay connected in every aspect of my life, whether it's by calling my sisters more often or taking more photos of my beautiful niece, or even something as seemingly trivial as listening to Christmas carols while making dinner for my husband.

Doesn't it seem strange that technology lets me do this? That while I'm feeling so "Norman Rockwell" in December, I'm also relying on the latest camera lenses and the best GSM network to do that? It's just plain not true that technology and CE devices are isolating; more often than not, they provide a way to connect with the things and people we value and cherish the most. That is at the top of my list this holiday season, for sure.

The garland, by the way, has white and sage crystals on frosty-looking laurel leaves.

Happy holidays, and live well, friends.

Katie Sommer  
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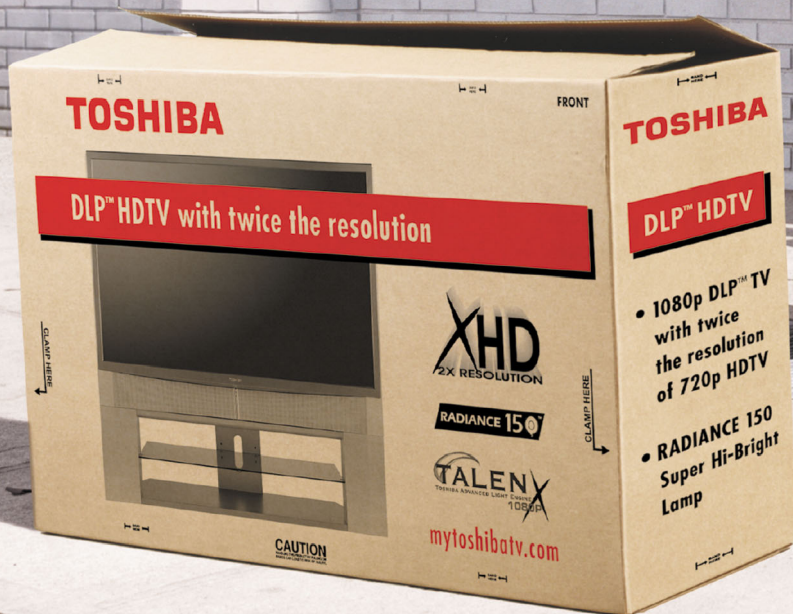
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TOSHIBA **XHD** HDTV WITH DLP™ TECHNOLOGY FOR TWICE THE RESOLUTION. THEY GOT THEIRS. WHAT'S STOPPING YOU?

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# ce news

COMPILED BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

## XM Launches

Satellite radio is well-known for delivering broadcasts for niche audiences. Now, consider yourself part of another programming niche. In October XM Satellite Radio launched "Take Five," a channel of talk, lifestyle, and entertainment programming for women. Anchoring the channel are broadcasts of two television programs, "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" and "The Tyra Banks Show." The channel also airs "The Judith Warner Show," an original XM broadcast featuring best-selling author Warner, who wrote "Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety." In addition, listeners can tune into original and "reversioned" programming from the Food Network and HGTV.

# TAKE FIVE

## Channel For Women



## Limited-Edition Bartley Bag Unveiled For Sony VAIO



Digital cameras and laptop computers are not usually accessories of choice on the catwalk when fashion designers reveal their new lines of clothing. But Sony VAIO notebooks, Cyber-shot cameras, and Walkman MP3 players were on display in San Diego this fall when British designer Luella Bartley held her Spring/Summer 2006 runway show. At the event, Bartley introduced the Luella laptop bag, which she designed exclusively for the VAIO. She also displayed her new accessory bags for the MiniDisc Walkman and accessory cases for the Network Walkman. According to a Sony spokeswoman, the products aren't expected to be available until March 2006.



## Study Finds No Link Between Cell Phones & Tumor

Researchers from London's Institute of Cancer Research have published a study on the Web site of the *British Journal of Cancer* in which they say no link can be found between cellphone use and brain cancer. The institute says it is the largest study to date into the relationship between the use of cell phones and the risk of **acoustic neuroma**, a benign tumor that develops in the nerve that connects the brain to the ear and inner ear. This tumor can cause the loss of hearing and balance but does not spread to other parts of the body. Researchers conclude that there is no "substantial" risk of cell-phone users developing this tumor within the first 10 years of using a cell phone, regardless of how much they use their phone. They cannot, however, rule out an increased risk in people once they have used their cell phones longer than a decade.



## HP Wins Another Web Site Award

In the September issue, we told you that HP's consumer Web site ([www.hpshopping.com](http://www.hpshopping.com)) was named best site by the Online Customer Respect Study. Now the company has earned its fifth consecutive Best Computer Retailer Web Site honor from the Web Marketing Association ([www.webaward.org](http://www.webaward.org)). Web sites for Circuit City and CompUSA were given Standard of Excellence awards in the same category.



## Authors Guild Sues Google

The New York-based Authors Guild, a society of more than 8,000 published authors in the United States, has filed a class-action lawsuit in federal court against search engine giant Google over its scanning of books for its Google Print Library Project ([print.google.com](http://print.google.com)). The lawsuit seeks unspecified damages and an injunction to prevent what it calls copyright infringements. Google has agreements with the New York Public Library and the libraries of four universities (Harvard, Michigan, Oxford, and Stanford) to make digital copies of many of the works housed in those libraries so that the contents can be searched via the Web. Registered users of Google Print can view the entire contents of books in the public domain but can see only a few sentences of text around the search term from books still protected by copyright law. To register to use Google Print, you need to create a free account with Google. Google Print remains active even though the lawsuit has been filed.





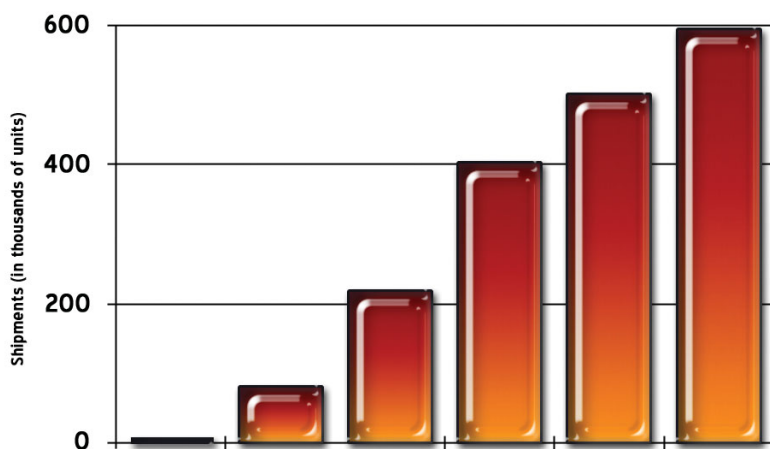
## Industry Experts Anticipate Small Growth In Holiday Retail Sales

The 2004 holiday retail season was the strongest in the last five years. This year retailers can expect sales to increase about 5% over last year, with holiday spending to top \$435 billion, according to the National Retail Federation ([www.nrf.com](http://www.nrf.com)). Almost one-fifth of all retail industry sales occur during November and December.

## The New Must-Haves For Home Offices

Lyra Research predicts that color laser MFPs (multiple function printers/peripherals) will become the new must-have product for home and small offices. A recent report from Lyra says that shipments of sub-\$1,000 color laser MFPs in North America will skyrocket in the next few years, enjoying a compound annual growth of more than 220%. The growth will be due in part to buyers replacing their current black-and-white laser printers, according to Lyra.

North American Shipments Of Color Laser MFPs, 2004-2009



Source: Lyra Research, Inc.,

Hard Copy Industry Advisory Service, First-Half 2005 Forecast

## Top-Selling Camcorders

Based on July sales of more than \$88 million, these are the Top 5 best-selling brands of camcorders, with Sony leading the pack.

| Brand        | Percent Of Market Share |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Sony      | 46.2%                   |
| 2. Panasonic | 15%                     |
| 3. JVC       | 14.4%                   |
| 4. Canon     | 12.5%                   |
| 5. Samsung   | 8.3%                    |



## tidbits

In a survey of more than 7,000 users in 15 nations, more than 75% of respondents said that better battery life is the main feature they want in their cell phones and PDAs.

Source: InformationWeek

The same survey found that almost 70% of U.S. respondents never use the camera function in their phones.

Source: InformationWeek

This year marks the fourth year in a row in which shipments of Bluetooth-enabled products have more than doubled from the previous year.

Source: In-Stat

By 2010, 62% of American homes will have broadband Internet access, 53% will own a laptop, and 37% will use a DVR.

Source: Forrester Research

20% of all consumers surveyed, including 56% of teens, are interested in buying a cell phone capable of playing MP3s. Only 14% would replace their MP3 player with such a phone.

Source: The NPD Group

Samsung is reportedly working on a dual-format disc player, due out next year, that will support both Blu-ray Disc and HD-DVD formats.

Source: TWICE

More than one-third of consumers surveyed are likely to buy a DVD even if they already have recorded the programming contained on the DVD.

Source: In-Stat



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# shelfwatch

Functionality  
is important.  
But looking  
good  
doesn't hurt  
either. These  
new prod-  
ucts really  
are as good  
as they look.



## Kodak EasyShare-One

\$599.95 plus  
\$99.95 wireless card

[www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com)

Kodak's latest is more than just an attractive and powerful camera with a 3-inch fold-out LCD for easy viewing. Its Wi-Fi compatibility and generous built-in storage let you store up to 1,500 photos, email or upload shots via wireless networks, and browse or manage picture albums—all without touching a computer.



## iPod nano

\$199 to \$249

[www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)

The latest in Apple's iPod line, the nano is striking. Pencil-thin, with clean lines and simple controls, it sets a new bar for diminutive music players. Available in 2GB (500 song) and 4GB (1,000 song) capacities, it won't make you skimp on your favorite tunes, either.



## Belkin USB Anywhere

\$39.99

[www.belkin.com](http://www.belkin.com)

Sharing and storing beautiful photos (or beautiful music) just got easier. Belkin's USB Anywhere connects two USB devices or cables (digital cameras, MP3 players, thumb drives) and lets you transfer files between them without even having a computer around.



## Motorola ROKR

\$249.99 with service plan

[direct.motorola.com](http://direct.motorola.com)

Why carry a separate music player and mobile phone? Motorola's new ROKR, available with Cingular service, comes with iTunes software and the ability to transfer up to 100 songs from your Mac or PC. That's one less gadget to stuff in your purse.



## Mitsubishi WD-62827

\$5,799

[www.mitsubishi-tv.com](http://www.mitsubishi-tv.com)

Beautiful, thin, and reasonably priced HDTV is here. A case in point: Mitsubishi's newest model. This model uses DLP technology to create a 62-inch screen in a 20-inch deep cabinet for less than \$6,000. And that isn't all—it includes a hard drive for recording shows and movies (16 hours of HD content, 160 hours of standard programming) and a nine-format memory card slot to play digital photos, video, or audio directly through your TV.





open

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Accessories With Style

Let it snow.

COMPILED BY SEAN DOOLITTLE



## USB Holiday Ornaments

\$11.99 (tree) • \$9.99 (snowman)

[www.thinkgeek.com](http://www.thinkgeek.com)

Now what fun is December without a little gaudy glow? Come on, it's the end of the year. Even style needs a holiday. Yule up your desk with one of these USB-powered wintertime tchotchkes. The LED inside cycles through a cheerfully garish routine of red, green, blue, and purple. Compatible with PC, MAC, SUN, and PlayStation 2; no batteries or software required. Faux snow not included.



## bodybugg Calorie Management System

approximately \$499 (bodybugg-to-you package)

[www.bodybugg.com](http://www.bodybugg.com)

If you're already planning on spending January working off those November and December meals, here's a way to track your progress down to the calorie. The bodybugg system consists of an armband loaded with data sensors that monitor your movements, temperature flux, and other information to measure your total calorie expenditure. Wirelessly upload your data to the Web-based interface to monitor your daily progress and generate a weekly weight loss assessment. Visit BodyMedia on the Web to find out how to sign up for the program in your area.



## Macmedia Laser Etching

\$20 to \$50 (iPods) • \$35 to \$200 (Powerbooks)

[www.etchamac.com](http://www.etchamac.com)

Now you can get your Mac a makeover. Using a precision CO<sub>2</sub> laser, the folks at Macmedia can etch everything from your corporate logo to your personal philosophy to a picture of your kitty on your iPod mini, iPod, or Powerbook. You can order a new device or send in your own. Pricing varies. Laser removal of ill-advised laser etchings costs extra.



## mobiBLU 1GB Cube Digital Audio Player

\$129.72 • [www.mobiblueamerica.com](http://www.mobiblueamerica.com)

Tired of lugging around that big, bulky, old-fashioned iPod everywhere you go? Here we have the world's smallest flash-based MP3 player, featuring 8 to 10 hours of audio, SRS WOW sound effects, FM radio, FM/voice recording, LED display, and a sleep timer, all the size of a sugar cube. Lanyard, headphones, USB cable, and software included.





# Business at home never sounded so good.

The new iHome iH5™ makes your iPod® earbud free. So you can talk on the phone. Tackle paperwork. And hold meetings in your home office against a backdrop of incredibly rich, natural stereo sound from our iH5 Reson8™ speakers.

The iH5 has a digital AM/FM clock radio that will, should you snooze at work, wake you to the sounds of your iPod! And it does all this while charging your iPod, so it's ready to go when you are.

## iHome is home base.



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www.ihomedirect.com



For all docking iPods®\*  
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iPod is a registered trademark owned by Apple Computer Inc. in the U.S. and in other countries.

\*except iPod® shuffle

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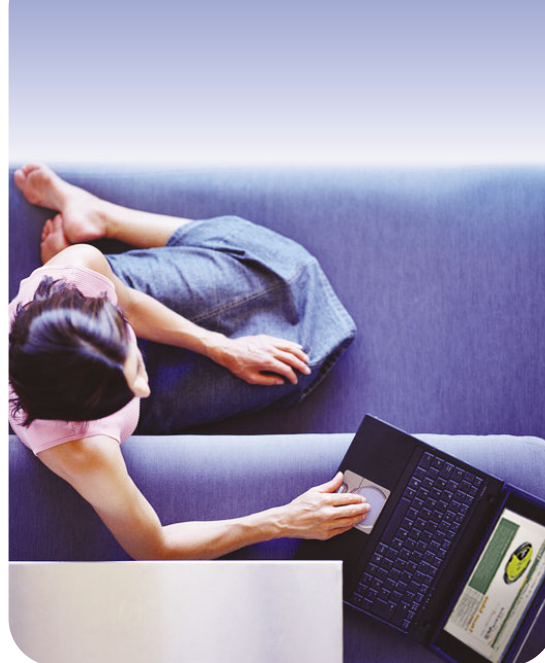


open

Shopping Site Of The Month

# Woot!

[www.woot.com](http://www.woot.com)



If you like a bit of unpredictability when you shop, Woot might be the kind of site you're looking for. In the few months we've been visiting the site, Woot has offered, among other things, a 40GB portable media player, a 61-inch high-definition TV, and an ice cream maker. But if any of those items sound intriguing to you, you'll have to look elsewhere because the fun thing about Woot is that it offers one item per day. If you miss it, you're out of luck.

## I Want One!

At first glance, Woot may not look like much of a site. (After all, what fun can a shopping site be that only offers one product, right?) But let us assure you that looks can be deceiving.

Here's how it works: Every day at 12 a.m. CST, Woot posts a new product, often at an incredibly low price, on the home page. The item (called the Woot) is available for that day only and will be discontinued promptly at 11:59 p.m. unless it sells out before that. If that's the case, you'll know because the I Want One! button on the home page will be replaced by a SOLD OUT button, but Woot still won't post a new product until midnight.

The Woot includes the product name, condition, and price. (On the day this article was written, for example, the Woot was a new Cardscan Executive Business Card Scanner for \$129.99, plus \$5 shipping.) Below the Woot, you'll find tabs detailing Product Info (a description of the product) and

Product Stats (including the last Wooter to buy one and even a bar chart detailing how many have been bought each hour).

If you discover you can't live without the Woot, click the I Want One! button. To make your purchase, you'll have to sign up for an account. (Click Create An Account and follow the directions on the Join Us page.) Once you've done that, you're an official Wooter, and you can make your purchase.

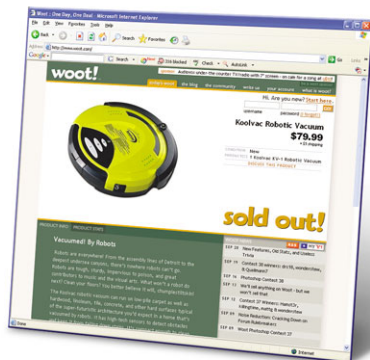
## The Community

If you're a hard-core shopper, you may just be interested in the Woot of the day. But if you're the curious type, you may

also want to dive in to the Woot site to see what makes it tick. Click the What Is Woot? tab for an extensive FAQ section that can tell you everything you want to know about Woot. We found ourselves actually laughing out loud while reading them, and that's an FAQ first.

To learn more about what's at the heart of the site, click The Community tab. Here, you'll find four Member Forums, including Woots, News, Contests, and Everything Else. This is where serious Wooters come to discuss, well, Woots, news, contests, and everything else. The Woot forum is a great place to get feedback on a product you may be considering. Wooters, it seems, don't hold back when it comes to voicing their opinions on an item. And that's good news for you.

While you won't get a great selection at Woot, that's not what the site is about. It's about providing its members with fun CE products at great prices. And if you happen upon something you can't live without, you, too, will come to love the Woot. 



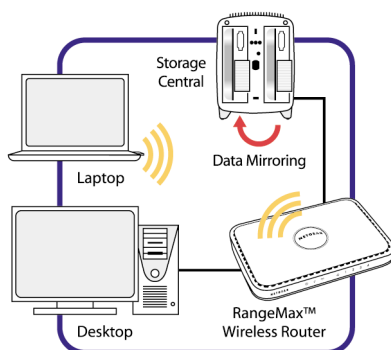
BY JOY MARTIN





#### Storage Central SC101

- **Fail-Safe:** Protect, mirror, and synchronize files automatically\*\*
- **Shared:** Store and share photos, videos, music, games, documents
- **Accessible:** Files accessed by all PCs on network as a simple letter drive
- **Easy:** Fast and easy set up with SmartWizard™ Storage Manager
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Fail-safe mirroring and file synchronization. Up to two disks with multiple drives may be shared or kept private. Connect wired or wirelessly anywhere on the network.

## Central Storage For Your Home Network

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The new NETGEAR® Storage Central (SC101) is the storage device of choice for PC users seeking a fail-safe, expandable, and easily shared storage solution at an affordable price. With thousands of important personal or business documents, photos, music, and videos moving to digital format, Storage Central has emerged as the centrally accessible, fully protected, must-have solution for the digitally inclined. Storage Central is a breeze to set up with the SmartWizard™ Storage Manager and is compatible with virtually every wireless/wired router or switch on the market. Sharing is made easy because all your networked PCs are allowed access to large volumes of valuable digital content with the simplicity of your C: drive. With two IDE ports, expandability is never an issue - just slide in any standard IDE storage drive of any capacity and start backing up all of your files - in real time.\* Safely synchronize, duplicate, and protect all your digital data with confidence in one compact, affordable, convenient location, and start enjoying NETGEAR-quality peace of mind. For more information, visit [www.netgear.com/go/SC](http://www.netgear.com/go/SC)



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\*Select any capacity IDE disks, sold separately.

\*\*Advanced backup software from SmartSync is included.





*Each month, Vince Cogley and Trista Kunce, both staff members at Sandhills Publishing, share their thoughts about a device or two of their choice. They may not reach common ground on living room décor, but they both agree that CE helps them live well, just sometimes in different ways.*

# His . . .

I like explosions. A lot. I like to watch explosions, and, when done in a controlled environment under the proper supervision, I like to create explosions. In fact, few things excite me more than a good, old-fashioned ka-boom.

Despite a slight exaggeration over my penchant for pyrotechnics, actually hearing a rich, thunderous explosion in a movie is pure aural bliss. But let's not confuse "rich" and "thunderous" with "low" and "loud"; a powered subwoofer that produces inaccurate bass and is little more than loud is one of my biggest qualms over cheap HTBs (home theaters in a box). Because a sloppy subwoofer quickly puts a damper on my home-theater experience, I usually prefer to build home-theater systems component by component. Boston Acoustics' Avidia 610 makes me reconsider this stance. The Avidia 610's 200W powered subwoofer (actually, Boston's PV700; \$500 if purchased separately) alone makes this a worthy HTB. Listening to this subwoofer isn't just an experience; it's almost a new, surreal state of mind.

I eagerly cued up the Omaha Beach landing scene from "Saving Private Ryan" and adjusted the PV700's volume to an assertive yet not overpowering level. Hearing such deep, clean bass during a loud explosion was a vital piece of the immersive audio adventure the 610 offers. "The Notebook" or any other title from my fair, flaxen-haired counterpart's library doesn't do this system justice. There's nothing like an action movie to unleash a good HTB's surround-sound potential.

Similarly explosive scenes in "Gladiator" and "The Matrix Revolutions" were just as impressive. When you listen to a great-sounding movie on high-quality speakers, you really feel like you're at the epicenter of the action. The Avidia 610 brought sounds in each film to life that I wasn't aware existed. This HTB loves action flicks, and if I could convince Trista to feel the same affection, my life would be much less complicated.

After she held me captive through "Moulin Rouge," Trista and I tested the 610's mettle with a few CDs. Coldplay's Chris Martin's distinctive falsetto immediately sprang to life from the center channel speaker (Boston's Micro 110; \$120 separately), but I thought the PV700 stole the show when we listened to the White Stripes' latest album, "Get Behind Me Satan." Each time the subwoofer fired, it felt like Meg White's bass drum was literally in the room. The amazing realism was nearly disconcerting.

I'd consider the Avidia 610 near upper end of the midlevel HTBs. Although it's not difficult to set up and sounds great right out of the box, you'll definitely want to spend the extra time to properly calibrate it. You may want to call on a tech-savvy friend or hire a professional to make the Avidia 610 realize its full potential. 

BY VINCE COGLEY





# & Hers CE

Honestly, I don't know a lot about the specifics of an HTB (home theater in a box). I do know that these systems give you a movie theater-like experience in your home while you're watching a DVD, but how will a salsa CD sound blaring from an HTB when I'm entertaining guests at a Latin-themed dinner party? Will the music inspire salsa dancing? Or will my guests drop their chilaquiles and run for the border?

Fortunately, Señor Vince knows a thing or two about HTBs and helped me become more familiar with everything from connecting the speakers to listening for the differences between low and mid bass while watching a couple of movies and listening to several CDs.

The first thing I noticed about Boston Acoustics' Avidea 610 HTB wasn't the sound because, of course, first we had to set up the system. Despite my worries about arranging six speakers so that I could experience what Vince calls an "immersive audio adventure" (aka an "it's-like-you're-there" experience) and properly connecting all speakers and the TV to the receiver, the 610 was fairly easy to set up. (And, actually, assembly was so quick and easy that I really didn't need Vince's assistance, but don't tell him that.)

Although setup was a snap, the speaker wires proved cumbersome and ugly. You can hide these wires behind your speakers and various objects along the floor or thread them through your wall, but that's a whole other project I don't have time to get into.

Nevertheless, even if the wires were hidden, I still wouldn't be impressed with the appearance of the system itself. Yes, the brushed silver speakers and receiver are fashionable right now, but for \$1,199, I expected something that looked as if it cost more than \$1,000. (Check out Sony's Dream System HTBs. Now *those* are stylish.) The receiver was rather plain-looking with a plastic faceplate, and the speakers were unimpressive with metal grills that closely resembled the bland, less expensive speakers currently in my basement.

However, despite the Avidea 610's rather modest appearance, I was impressed with the it's-like-you're-there experience I got when Vince and I watched "Saving Private Ryan" and "Moulin Rouge" and previewed CDs for my upcoming dinner fiesta. I'll admit that a couple times I ducked to avoid bullets during "Saving Private Ryan," felt like kicking my legs up during the cancan scene in "Moulin Rouge," and tried to convince Vince that salsa wasn't just for eating. Mostly, though, I felt the 610's true surround-sound power during action movies and when I listened to CDs that relied on percussion and loud vocals and focused less on softer instruments, such as violins or flutes, and mellow vocals.

It's a good thing salsa music has a dynamic, piercing beat that relies immensely on percussion and a horn section. Es tiempo de fiesta! 

BY TRISTA KUNCE

Avidea 610  
\$1,199

[www.bostonacoustics.com](http://www.bostonacoustics.com)





# Shopping Advice

## Take The Guesswork Out Of Buying A/V Gear



**N**othing adds a more modern touch to a room than a sleek HDTV, especially when a new DVD player sends your favorite flicks to it as sound envelops you from a new home-theater setup. There's just one catch. Who wants to shop for this stuff when there are so many choices, technical terms, and salespeople trying to cash in on our confusion? Arm yourself with this shopping guide and checklist when you compare products so you can focus on what's important.

### HDTVs

An HDTV displays images using dots of color called **pixels** (picture elements). **Resolution** is the measure of the number of horizontal pixels compared to vertical pixels and is often advertised using only the number of vertical pixels (called vertical resolution) followed by an "i" or "p," as in 480i, 480p, 720p, 1080i, and 1080p.

480i and 480p are not high-definition resolutions, so look at the television's specification sheet to make sure the default (usually called native) vertical resolution is 720 pixels or greater. Beware of sets that are advertised as EDTVs (Enhanced Definition Televisions); they support 480p but aren't truly HDTVs because they can't handle 720p, 1080i, or 1080p content.

An "i" indicates that the television is interlaced, while a "p" tells you that it supports progressive-scan technology at that

vertical resolution. On an interlaced set, each frame of video is divided into odd and even rows (called fields), and only one set of rows is displayed at a time. This causes video to flicker and reduces overall brightness. Many HDTVs overcome these limitations by using progressive-scan video where each frame is displayed completely, much like film at a theater.

Also, get a TV with a CableCARD slot if you'd rather not have a set-top box to access digital cable. Many cable companies already offer (or will offer) CableCARDS that plug into compatible TVs.

## DVD Players

Look for a DVD player that can handle disc types including CD-R/RWs and DVD±R/RWs. A good player also reads various file formats including digital music files (MP3, DVD-Audio), DivX (an Internet movie format), and picture CDs (JPEG).

Only purchase a DVD player that supports progressive-scan (480p). Even if your TV can't take advantage of progressive-scan now, you won't need to look for a replacement later when you upgrade to a TV that supports progressive-scan mode. If you have a surround-sound setup, look

for a player that reads the Dolby Digital, Dolby Digital EX, DTS, and DTS ES soundtracks found on most DVD movies.

Finally, look for a player with a variety of high-quality audio and video outputs. Coaxial or optical outputs are essential for sending surround-sound data to your receiver. Component, DVI (Digital Visual Interface), and HDMI (High-Definition Multimedia Interface) outputs offer the best video quality and are the only output types that let you deliver 480p, 720p, 1080i, or 1080p signals to your TV.

## Home Theater In A Box

HTBs (home theaters in a box) include surround-sound components that all work with one another. If the system you buy comes with a DVD player, make sure it conforms to the specifications recommended in the previous section.

Most movie soundtracks are optimized for 5.1-channel playback, so at minimum your system should have left, center, and right front speakers and left and right rear speakers, along with a subwoofer.

Check to see if the system comes with speaker stands and wall-mounting brackets that you'll need to position the speakers effectively around your room. These accessories can be expensive when purchased separately, and finding stands that match your speakers well is a chore.

## Don't Forget The Cables

Most A/V products don't come with the DVI or component cables that you need to take advantage of progressive-scan output, so be sure to include room in your budget for cables that provide the best possible output and input quality. Avoid RCA or composite cables and use DVI or component cables whenever possible for the best audio and video quality. 

## SHOPPING CHECKLIST

### HDTV

- |                                           |                                   |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Resolutions Supported</b>              | <b>Native Resolution</b>          |
| <input type="radio"/> 480i                | <input type="radio"/> 720p        |
| <input type="radio"/> 480p                | <input type="radio"/> 1080i       |
| <input type="radio"/> 720p                | <input type="radio"/> 1080p       |
| <input type="radio"/> 1080i               |                                   |
| <input type="radio"/> 1080p               | <b>Best Video Inputs</b>          |
|                                           | <input type="radio"/> Component   |
| <b>Technology</b>                         | <input type="radio"/> DVI         |
| <input type="radio"/> DLP                 | <input type="radio"/> HDMI        |
| <input type="radio"/> LCD                 |                                   |
| <input type="radio"/> Rear-Projection CRT | <b>Cable Needs</b>                |
| <input type="radio"/> CRT                 | <input type="radio"/> Set-top box |
| <input type="radio"/> LCoS                | <input type="radio"/> CableCARD   |
| <input type="radio"/> Plasma              |                                   |

### Home-Theater-In-A-Box

#### Includes Following Components

- ☐ Mounting brackets
- ☐ Speaker stands
- ☐ Subwoofer
- ☐ At least five satellite speakers

### DVD Player

#### Reads Following Disc Types

- ☐ CD-R
- ☐ CD-RW
- ☐ DVD-R
- ☐ DVD-RW
- ☐ DVD+R
- ☐ DVD+RW

#### Supports Following Surround-Sound Formats

- ☐ Dolby Digital
- ☐ Dolby Digital EX
- ☐ DTS
- ☐ DTS ES

#### Outputs

- ☐ Component
- ☐ DVI
- ☐ HDMI
- ☐ Coaxial audio
- ☐ Optical audio

#### Plays Following Formats

- ☐ SACD
- ☐ DVD-Audio
- ☐ JPEG
- ☐ MP3
- ☐ DivX



### Notes

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BY TRACY BAKER



# One Stereo, Four Uses Of Amplifiers & Ambience

**B**ig or small, short or tall, there seems to be a stereo in every home. It might have been a plastic-cased record player when you were a kid and later a boom box in your dorm room. Today, perhaps, it's a stack of black boxes flanked by fabric-covered speakers capable of flooding the room with Sarah Vaughan or Norah Jones.

Some people's stereos never play anything but the same radio station, day in, day out. In case you're feeling a tug into the same boring routine, here's a quartet of novel uses for your sound system.

## 1 Amplify Your Entertainment

If you don't yet have a dedicated home-theater system, you can still get a theater-like soundstage for audio extravaganzas such as "The Motorcycle Diaries" or "Star Wars Episode III: Revenge Of The Sith." Simply run an audio cable from the LINE OUT on your DVD player to your stereo receiver's AUX or LINE IN jack. Many stereo speakers have the quality and size to bring out nuances in the performance and lend impressive gravitas to the score. And by the by, you can connect your MP3 player, or perhaps your game console, to the stereo in the same way for a broader mix of songs than a handful of CDs can provide.



## Hook Yourself Up

**O**n a technical note, most of these scenarios involve your stereo's AUX, AUDIO IN, or LINE IN port (for audio entering your stereo to play through the speakers) or the PHONES, AUDIO OUT, or LINE OUT output jack (for sound leaving your stereo to go to another device). Don't forget to push the

AUX or appropriate button on your stereo's receiver to tell it which source you want to hear. Check your stereo's and device's manuals to see if they have compatible digital audio ports, such as SPDIF (Sony Philips Digital Interface Format), which provides clearer sound than the analog connections mentioned in the main article.

You may need to buy an adapter or cable to connect some devices to your receiver; many inexpensive ones will sound just fine.

Oh, and don't forget to turn your stereo's volume down before you connect anything to it. A sudden loud noise through it could shred your speakers and hurt your hearing.

## 2 Rip & Burn

Nero 7 Ultra Edition (\$99.99; [www.nero.com](http://www.nero.com)), Roxio Easy Media Creator Suite 8 (\$99.95; [www.roxio.com](http://www.roxio.com)), and similar software suites can help you turn irreplaceable audio tapes and LP

records into CDs, as long as your stereo can play those oldies but goodies. Connect a stereo cable from your receiver's PHONES or LINE OUT jack to your PC's AUDIO IN (blue) jack. You use the software to record those old tunes on your computer as audio files and then later burn them to CD as you would any other audio tracks. The main trick to this project, besides the time it takes, is to adjust the stereo's headphone or main volume, as well as the recording level on the PC, to get the best sound quality without any buzzing during the loudest parts.

## 3 Stream It

Take advantage of all the music files you've downloaded to your PC, even if you keep it in a different room than your stereo. With a wireless audio adapter such as D-Link's DSM-920BT PersonalAir USB Stereo Adapter Kit (\$134.99; [www.dlink.com](http://www.dlink.com)), you can stream the songs playing on your computer to any stereo.

The sending adapter connects to your PC's USB port with a cable, and the other adapter hooks up to the AUX or LINE IN jack on your stereo with another cable. Other devices, such as the Netgear MP101 Wireless Digital Music Player (about \$85 on average at online retailers; [www.netgear.com](http://www.netgear.com)), work with your existing wireless network. The MP101 shows you what song is playing at the moment and lets you control the music with a remote.

## 4 Set A Mood

Ah, there's nothing like quiet mood music during a romantic dinner. Why else own a stereo, really? But that's not the end of its ambient-sound talents. Put on a woodsy sound effects CD and pitch a tent in the living room for some cozy "camping" for two. Spin a monster mash disc for your next Halloween party or as a creepy soundtrack for your niece and nephew's "haunted house" made of couch cushions. Later, tune the receiver to the static in between radio channels, and you'll have an ad hoc noise generator to help you sleep.





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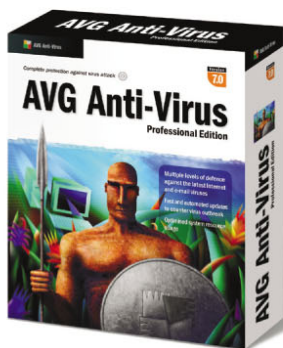
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# Create Your Dream Living Room

## Use CE To Enhance Your Living Space



K, so you probably won't ever have Ty and his crew visit you for an extreme makeover of your home.

But still, we can't help drooling over those spectacular family rooms seen on popular TV shows such as "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition." It's not even the home theaters we envy, but the feeling that the living room—the same room where our kids feed the dog pieces of their PB & J sandwiches and spill Kool-Aid on the floor—could be a proud focal part of our lives, especially when entertaining.

Manufacturers and designers have heard your plea. Read on to find out how you can use CE to transform your family room into a comfortable home-theater haven.

### The Big Dimension

Before you research and buy your new TV, you first have to focus on the dimensions of your space. Decide how far away you can and should sit from that new television set to better help you wade through the multitude of choices. The rule of thumb that Ray Lepper, president of CEDIA (Custom Electronic Design & Installation Association) and owner of Home Media Richmond in Midlothian, Va., uses is that you should sit far enough away to equal two to three times the size of the screen. So, if you have a 60-inch television (roughly five feet), you want to sit between 10 and 15 feet away. "If they are closer, most people feel overwhelmed. Any farther and they say, 'Gee, that's nice

but it's really not that big,'" he says. Using his guideline also prevents the folks relegated to the side chairs from being stuck with a crummy angle of the picture. They, too, will enjoy a more straight-on look if they aren't sitting too close to the TV.

Overall, M. Andrew Lee, director of marketing for the IcOn Furniture Collection ([www.iconfurniturecollection.com](http://www.iconfurniturecollection.com)) in Passaic, N.J., prefers to work with rooms that are at least 12 x 16 feet to accommodate large televisions and furniture placement. Televisions with 42-inch or larger screens need about two feet on either side along the wall to balance the room's proportions properly. And in Lee's experience, families who choose a plasma or LCD TV of any size with

high-definition pictures should sit no less than six to eight feet from the screen to avoid eyestrain.

## Electronic Heaven

Selecting the best television is like trying to pinpoint the best car—the answer is largely an individual's preference. But a high-definition TV is likely to make the cut on most people's lists.

One thing to consider when shopping for a TV is that even though it might be an HDTV, it may not include the tuner to get over-the-air HD reception. If you subscribe to cable or satellite services, this lack of a tuner is a moot point. But the antenna crowd will need to buy a TV with an HD tuner built into the package.

Next, do you want a plasma, LCD, or rear-projection TV? Surprisingly, some manufacturers' sales reps are less enthusiastic about the flat-panel option, pointing out that the cost for that thin advantage is still somewhat higher when compared to rear-projection prices. Terry Shea, a spokesperson for JVC of America says some people avoid hanging the thin TVs on the wall because of the intense mounting requirements, not to mention the massive wiring they require inside that wall. However, if your room is bright, plasma or LCD technology will offer a bright enough picture for you to see it clearly despite the room's lighting.

Rear-projection TVs, too, offer wonderful picture quality. The best way to choose among the technologies in this category—3LCD, DLP (Digital Light Processing), and LCoS (Liquid Crystal on Silicon)—Lepper advises, is to watch the same material side by side. DLP's higher contrast may make more sense for the sports buff who watches a lot of weekend games, while 3LCD's color accuracy, such as that seen in Sony's 42-inch Grand WEGA KDF-E42A10 (\$1,999.99; [www.sonymstyle.com](http://www.sonymstyle.com)), would please the movie critics who watch a lot of DVD movies.

LCoS creates a smooth picture with little pixelation, but currently only JVC and Sony produce TVs using this technology.

As for resolution, Lepper tells his clients not to sweat the details here, either. The latest and greatest pixel resolution for televisions on the market is 1080p. "If the television you like offers 1080p, all the better. But should you turn your nose up at 720p? No," Lepper says. "720p is still a lot of pixels, and it looks beautiful, so I wouldn't make my buying decision on whether the television is 1080p or not."

Finally, consider products that combine functions, such as DVD players with DVR capabilities. For example, in addition to DVR and DVD recording, JVC's DR-DX55 (\$1,500; [www.jvc.com](http://www.jvc.com)) also plays CDs, MP3s, JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group) files, and Mini DVs. You can find other combo units for less than \$1,000 depending on the unit's capabilities.

Also, carefully consider your options for audio components because music can have such a personal effect on people. "We react more emotionally to sound," Lepper reminds. "We jump at the sound of thunder, not the picture of lightning. We don't cry at a pretty picture; we cry at a pretty song." So, it's important to find speakers that provide not only an aesthetically pleasing appearance in your room, but also impressive sound. Check out Definitive Technology's Mythos Floorstanding Tower Loudspeakers, such as the sleek Mythos Four (\$699 each; [www.definitivetech.com](http://www.definitivetech.com)), a 42-inch high speaker with a polished aluminum or polished black body. The Mythos Tower Loudspeakers are designed for you to mix and match with other speakers and a subwoofer for a full-sounding home-theater experience.

## A Touch Of Class

Televisions and speakers make a living room entertaining, but comfort depends on style. Black-and-white color schemes

## Sitting Pretty

We've seen a lot of furniture manufacturers spread their wings to offer custom sofas and chairs that work nicely in a cozy home-theater living room. After all, few folks want to park what looks like an airline seat in the middle of the largest (and arguably most used) room in their house.

Top-grade entertainment sofas feature popular leather or goose down that has an added layer of polyfill on top to prevent the quills from poking viewers in the legs. The result is a sofa that offers sinkability without the inconsistent bumps, which is crucial for concentrating and relaxing the next time you watch "Amelie." Your room should also have plenty of space for end tables and ottomans; we love coffee table-style ottomans that let you put your feet up and hold a mug of hot cocoa.

Entertainment centers, too, have evolved to better fit today's TV sets. Take, for instance, IcOn Furniture Collection's entertainment centers, the Alexander (\$2,699) and Sebastian (\$5,999; seen on the previous page). The built-in television mounts allow plasma televisions to appear as if they are floating, and the upscale, contemporary designs look sleek but still comfortable for a living room setting.

"Televisions today are like a piece of art—you want to show it off, and the right proportions make it look the best it can," says M. Andrew Lee, director of marketing for IcOn. One way you can accent a flat-panel television in a way that helps it blend into your décor but still look cool is to use a picture frame around it. Vision Art ([www.solarshadingsystems.com](http://www.solarshadingsystems.com)) in Newport Beach, Calif., offers fancy frames that surround an LCD TV or plasma screen hanging on the wall and display pieces of art across the television when it's not in use. ●





Installation by Electronics Design Group of Piscataway, NJ. [www.edgonline.com](http://www.edgonline.com)

play out well in this type of room, says Lee. "Plasma and LCD screens say high-fashion," he notes. "The ideal furniture, therefore, is contemporary." For that style, look for sleek lines, clean, uncomplicated patterns, and design touches such as lacquered wood as opposed to hard-edge chrome and glass. The latter scatters sound in all directions, turning your living room into an acoustical nightmare.

To help you optimize the sound quality of your room, you can use sound-diffusing panels, which can help you get better sound in a room with, say, wood floors. Though some sound-diffusing panels may not seem to coordinate well with the style of your room (some are just large, plain-looking panels), you can find others that are actual works of art. For example, MSR (Media Specialty Resources) distributes Salon Acoustics, framed art acoustic absorbers for your home theater that use photographs or paintings as covers for the absorbing

panels. This design lets families with almost any style create a product to enhance the sound in its home theater while also coordinating with the overall style of the room.

In addition, with black flat-panel TVs becoming more and more popular, they're easier than ever to incorporate into traditional décor, so you don't have to give up a cozy feel for the sake of your gear.

You should also look for heavy, lined draperies and thick carpeting such as berber to absorb some bouncing sound. Hard floors such as tile or concrete are very reflective, causing sound to bounce off other hard objects in the room until the sound dissipates.

After all, your ideal living room won't make your dreams come true unless it fits your lifestyle. 

BY JULIE STURGEON

## Budget Options

If your living room is too new to renovate or you can't afford to buy all new electronics and completely redecorate the room's motif, try these subtle enhancements to make life in your living room as stylish and conducive to your lifestyle as possible:

If you have to replace one thing, replace your TV. Today's models are so sleek and stylish that they instantly update your room.

Combine your myriad remotes into one device to avoid cluttering up your end tables with several remotes.

For your next get-together, feature your personal music collection piped directly from your iPod throughout the room using the iPort in-wall music system (starting at \$200; [www.sonance.com](http://www.sonance.com)).

If you have a flat-screen TV hanging on your wall or a large rear-projection for which you don't need an entertainment center, you probably need somewhere to store your DVD player, DVR, DVDs, CDs, stereo, etc. You can find affordable media storage furniture that will still blend stylishly with your living room. For example, Target's Westmore Walnut Entertainment Cabinet (\$99.99; [www.target.com](http://www.target.com)) has two adjustable shelves to store your devices or CDs and DVDs in the enclosed cabinet. And IKEA's MARKÖR TV Unit (\$229; [www.ikea.com](http://www.ikea.com)) provides several adjustable shelves to fit your media devices. Both units' wood finishes give them a welcoming, comfortable feel that is necessary in any inviting living room.



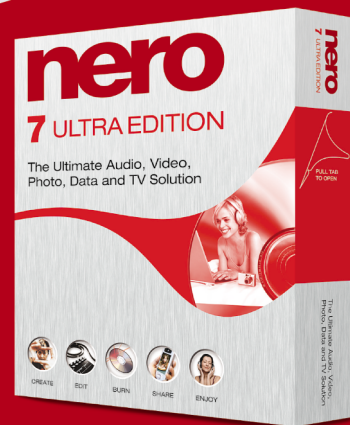
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EDIT



BURN



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ENJOY

Available at participating  
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\* Does not copy DVD with copy protection



# tips

## Play Your Christmas Carols

1

### Go Old School

Although the crisp sound of your high-priced, high-tech sound system has its perks, there is something comforting about the familiar sound of vinyl. For those of us who came of age before cassette tapes or CDs, Bing Crosby singing "White Christmas" on a record player is perfectly nostalgic. If you've long ago divested yourself of your record collection, a local thrift store, your parents' attic, or eBay can help out. To make the experience authentic, make homemade eggnog or mulled cider, decorate cookies, and string cranberries and popcorn while you listen.

2

### When In Rome . . .

If you're jaded about Christmas carols after listening to "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" in too many department stores this season, listen to the beautiful melodies of classic carols in an alternate—and sometimes their original—language. For a pleasant twist on old favorites and a chance to discover traditional carols from other cultures, too, treat yourself to a few new foreign-language Christmas CDs. We recommend "Silent Night: Famous German Carols," "Wolcum Yule: Celtic and British Christmas Carols," "La Bela Nais-sanza—French and Provencal Carols," and "The Three Tenors Christmas."

3

### All Instrumental

For classy and relaxing background music at a holiday dinner or cocktail party, step away from music with boisterous vocals and choose tasteful instrumental versions of carols or holiday-themed music instead, such as George Winston's solo piano album "December" or jazz albums such as the Glenn Miller Orchestra's box set "In the Christmas Mood." Playing them at discrete volumes will help guests enjoy the sensation of holiday cheer without feeling distracted by lyrics.



4

### Not So Silent Night

Whether your attitude is, "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em," or if you truly love to carol, a home karaoke machine will give you—and your family and friends—the chance to really belt out those festive tunes. There are lots of Christmas-themed karaoke CDs on the market ranging from Jeff Foxworthy's "Redneck 12 Days of Christmas" to "Silver Bells" and "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus." Amazon.com or a specialty online retailer such as AceKaraoke.com will give you plenty of options. Karaoke machines are also widely available to rent or buy. A new machine will run you anywhere from \$30 to \$500. We like the Tao Music IKTV DVD Karaoke machine (\$199; [www.brookstone.com](http://www.brookstone.com)).

5

### Play It Again, Sam

If the sky's the limit when it comes to your holiday budget, the Yamaha Disklavier Mark IV player piano (\$35,000; [www.yamaha.com](http://www.yamaha.com)) is the next best thing to actually hiring Natalie Cole to come and sing her father's famous favorites. You can play this concert-quality grand piano like a regular piano, or you can set it to perform a live, acoustic concert all on its own. Its special features include two discretely located full-color touchscreen Wi-Fi controllers, which can operate the piano from any room in your home. Music comes on CD or can be downloaded and then played, as though a ghost aficionado were at the keys. The tinkling ivories of this modern-day version of classical entertainment will lend elegance to any Christmas carols you ask it to play.

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE



## Moments of extreme clarity. Whenever you want them.

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# The Season Of Giving

## What's Hot For The 2005 Holidays



# A

year ago, American consumers spent more than \$222 billion during the Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa holiday shopping seasons, according to the National Retail

Federation ([www.nrf.com](http://www.nrf.com)). Billions will be spent this season, as well, but what will be the hot buys and must-haves consumers should watch for this time around?

Luckily for Xbox gamers, the new Xbox 360 from Microsoft (\$299.99; [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)) will be hitting—and flying off—the shelves. Scott Krugman, spokesperson for the NRF, said the gaming system will be a “very big” item this season. For hardcore players, the Xbox 360 console (\$399.99), which comes with more than \$200 worth of accessories, also will be available. But don’t look for Sony’s PlayStation 3. It won’t be released until next year.

### Home Entertainment

Although the price tags of hot CE products don’t usually get slashed the way other merchandise does during the holidays (see the “Shopping Strategies” sidebar), Krugman said that shoppers can still expect “aggressive pricing” from retailers, especially on high-definition televisions. “Retailers are really pushing these,” he said, “and consumers are accepting them.”

Case in point is Panasonic. As of Sept. 1, it lowered the MSRP of its widescreen flat-panel plasma TVs by an average of \$500. That means its top-selling 42-inch model, the TH-42PD50U, dropped to \$1,999.95, the first time it was priced below \$2,000.

Other companies have rolled out new models. In October, HP ([www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com)) made available three high-definition DLP microdisplay TVs: 50-inch, 58-inch, and 65-inch models at \$2,499.99, \$3,999.99, and \$5,499.99, respectively.

The Sony Grand WEGA SXRD rear-projection HDTVs released this fall are worth trying out in person. The 60-inch KDS-R60XBR1 (\$4,999.99; [www.sonymstyle.com](http://www.sonymstyle.com)) and the 50-inch KDS-R50XBR1 (\$3,999.99) both contain the Twin-View feature, which lets you watch two programs side by side.

No matter what type of TV you have, you need something good to watch on it. DVDs always make great gifts, and this year Krugman expects that “Star Wars, Episode III: Revenge of the Sith” (\$29.98) and “Batman Begins” (\$28.98) will be the hottest movie titles.

DVD sets of TV programs also make good gifts. The first season of “Lost” (\$59.99), a seven-disc set, arrived in stores this fall, as did the first season of those “Desperate Housewives” on Wisteria Lane (\$59.99).



the included AA batteries or optional rechargeable batteries.

The newest member of Apple's family of MP3 players, the iPod nano, ([www.apple.com/ipodnano](http://www.apple.com/ipodnano)), will surely top wish lists this holiday season. The pencil-thin nano comes in two sizes: the 2GB model (\$199), which holds up to 500 songs, and the 4GB model (\$249), which stores up to 1,000 songs. Both are available in black or white and weigh just 1.5 ounces.

Sony also recently released some unique MP3 players. It sounds odd, but the small, kidney bean-shaped Walkman Bean models are actually cool-looking. Plus, they fit ergonomically in the palm of your hand. The 512MB NW-E305 (\$119.95) stores about 345 songs and comes in coconut white and tropical ice blue, and the 1GB NW-E307 (\$149.95) is available in licorice black and cotton candy pink and stores almost 700 songs. Both models have an integrated FM tuner.

There's even something new for younger kids. The 128MB Disney Mix Sticks Player (\$49.99; [www.disneydirect.com](http://www.disneydirect.com)) can hold about 60 WMA songs or 30 MP3s. (An SD/MMC card slot is expandable for up to 1GB of music.) It plays songs that your kids download, as well as Disney Mix Clips, small memory cards containing hit songs from Walt Disney Records. The player is available in themes including Classic Disney and Forever A Princess and comes with earbuds and a USB 2.0 connector.

## Black Friday Blues

Traditionally, America's biggest shopping day of the year is Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving. Many shoppers fall under self-imposed pressure to secure the "best" deals by beating the rush to the malls and feel defeated if they don't get there in time. Don't suffer from Black Friday Blues. Remember, that isn't the only day to get good deals on the best new CE out there. 

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

## Shopping Strategies

Don't drive yourself crazy trying to get the bottom-dollar price on every gift you buy this holiday season. Sometimes the best deal comes in the form of what you get and when you get it, not just what you pay for it.

- **If you see it, buy it.** NFR's Scott Krugman suggests you shop for electronics in a different way than you might shop for apparel this time of year. "Apparel is a seasonal item and thus receives mark-downs, while items like the iPod and Xbox won't receive a sale price," he says. A hot CE item can go quickly, so buy it when you see it, he advises.
- **Shop online.** The advantages to shopping online, besides saving time and fuel, are numerous. Manufacturers' Web sites may offer sneak previews of new products, preordering, and special deals, such as a free accessory with purchase or free shipping.
- **Clip digital coupons.** Before you buy, head to Web sites such as TechBargains.com and DealCoupon.com. These two sites keep running tabs on special offers from manufacturers, online shops, and retailers. Similarly, scour your local newspaper for bargains from local retailers.
- **Be smart.** Keep your receipts, know the return policies, shop on secure Web sites, and order items early. ★

## New Cameras & Players

Expect a good selection on popular items such as digital cameras and MP3 players, too, Krugman says, which should continue to be good sellers this season.

Sony's newest member of the Cyber-shot line is the slim 5.1MP DSC-T5 (\$349.95). It has an aluminum body; weighs less than 5 ounces; and comes in black, silver, red, and champagne gold. The DSC-T5 features a 3X optical zoom lens, a 2.5-inch LCD, and 10 preset scene modes.

This fall Canon rolled out three new members of its popular PowerShot A-Series. The PowerShot A410 (\$149.99; [www.canonusa.com](http://www.canonusa.com)) has a 3.2X optical zoom lens, a 1.5-inch LCD, and more than a dozen special scene and color modes. The two higher-end models, the 7.1MP PowerShot A620 (\$399.99) and 5MP PowerShot A610 (\$299.99), both feature 4X optical zoom, a 2-inch LCD, and 20 shooting modes. All three can operate on



# Digital Cameras

Give A Gift That Keeps On Snapping

**F**or the past few holiday seasons, digital cameras have been among the hottest gifts on everyone's shopping lists, and the trend shows no sign of fading this year. Digicams are still following the usual course of relatively new technologies, with every year bringing better models at lower prices. That means this is the best season yet to put a smile on the face of the shutterbug in your life.

Let's look at a few things to take into account as you're shopping and some of the cameras you might want to consider.

## Match Megapixels To Needs

The greatest digicam myth is that the more megapixels a camera's image sensor has, the clearer and sharper its pictures will be. Actually, that's mostly manufacturer hype. More megapixels definitely come in handy, but what they'll let you do is take larger pictures, not necessarily better ones. A related benefit is that you can crop a small area out of the original photo and still keep it looking sharp at a decent print size, such as 4 x 6 inches.

The upshot, then, is don't let yourself get lured into paying extra money for more camera than the recipient really wants or needs. If her main interest is





For lovers of the latest technology, Nikon's Coolpix P1 and P2 are the world's first Wi-Fi digital cameras.

shooting photos to email friends, post to the Web, and make a few small prints, she doesn't need a camera capable of shooting files large enough for poster-sized prints.

Here's a loose guide to megapixels and the uses and upper-end print sizes you can expect from them. These aren't carved in stone, however. Image quality depends greatly on a camera's lens and processor, in addition to its megapixel resolution, and newer cameras are likely to be more advanced than older models.

**2MP.** Good for small-scale, general use: Post photos to the Web, email them, and get high-quality prints (good clarity but maybe some fuzziness to smaller details) up to 5 x 7 inches.

**3MP.** Good for typical home and family use: Post photos to the Web, email them, and get excellent quality prints, which are fairly close to film quality. (You may notice some digital artifacts; for instance, very fine detail,

## What Camera For Whom?

You wouldn't get the same digital camera for your dad that you'd get for your 'tween-aged niece, would you? Let's run through a few people who might be on your list and pair each one with an excellent digital camera.

**Dad.** Nikon Coolpix 8700 (\$799.99). Most dads love to tinker with technical gadgets, and this 8MP digicam will let him do just that. He can indulge in full manual control, play it safe with aperture and shutter priority modes, and if he needs awhile to get a handle on those, he can rely on full automation and 12 scene modes.

**Mom.** Casio Exilim EX-Z750 (\$449.99; [www.casio.com](http://www.casio.com)). This 7.2MP bestseller is small in size but big in features, including full manual control and a whopping 30 scene modes, so your Mom can snap big family shots suitable for framing.

**Grandparent.** Olympus Stylus 500 (\$349.99; [www.olympus.com](http://www.olympus.com)). In

addition to plenty of point-and-shoot settings for easy use, this 5MP camera features one of the best back-panel displays we've seen. It's big (2.5 inches) and remains clear even in direct light, so it will be friendly to eyes that may not see as sharply as they used to.

**Best friend.** Sony Cyber-shot DSC-T5 (\$349.95). New this fall, this 5.1MP addition to the Cyber-shot line comes in an ultra-sleek shape that will fit into almost any pocket or purse. Plus its choice of four colors will help you match your friend's sense of style.

**Niece/nephew/young sibling.** Canon PowerShot SD30 Digital ELPH (\$449.99). OK, it's a bit pricy, but this 5MP marvel packs plenty of goods into its tiny body (just 3.78 inches wide) and will be a guaranteed hit with the fashion conscious, coming in the colors Rockstar Red, Tuxedo Black, Glamour Gold, and Vivacious Violet. ★

such as strands of hair, may suffer from the jaggies.)

**4MP.** Good for the foregoing uses and for avid hobbyists; film-quality (that is, indistinguishable from film) prints up to 8 x 10.

**5MP.** Good for serious amateurs; film-quality prints up to 10 x 12.

**6MP.** Good for serious amateurs and even professionals; film-quality prints up to 11 x 14.

**7MP.** Film-quality prints up to 15 x 20.

**8MP.** Film-quality prints up to 18 x 24.

Above the 8MP threshold, we're getting into the territory of relatively

high-end cameras that the user is probably better off selecting for him- or herself. Again, the print sizes we've mentioned are not absolutes. For someone who's making their own prints at home, it's easy to extend their size and still maintain acceptable quality by reducing the printer resolution. The same photo file printed at 200dpi will be larger than if it's printed at 300dpi (the optimal setting for ink-jet printers), although it may not look as crisp.

Also, using software such as Photoshop, you can enlarge an image through the process of **interpolation** (adding new pixels to the existing photo). Professional printing services will do an even better job of it.



# ★ holiday gift guide ★

## Budget-Friendly Cameras

It's great if you do, but you probably don't have a holiday budget to hand out digicams as though you're digging into Santa's bottomless bag. Here are a few units that will inflict minimal damage on your wallet.

**Canon PowerShot A410**  
(\$179.99; [www.canonusa.com](http://www.canonusa.com))

**Fujifilm FinePix A345**  
(\$179.99; [www.fujifilm.com](http://www.fujifilm.com))

**HP Photosmart M22**  
(\$149.95; [www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com))

**Kodak EasyShare C300**  
(\$99.95; [www.kodak.com](http://www.kodak.com))

**Vivitar ViviCam 3705**  
(\$129.99; [www.vivitar.com](http://www.vivitar.com))

## How Much Should You Spend?

You can lay out about as much or as little (within reason) for a digital camera as you care to. Obviously, though, you don't want to give someone junk. You should be able to strike a good balance between cost and quality, without skimping on features, in the zone between \$150 and \$400. A huge number of well-equipped, go-anywhere compact cameras fall within this price range.

If you're shopping for someone whose photography needs are advanced enough for an SLR (single-lens reflex) camera, you'll pay considerably more—the least expensive, Nikon's D50 ([www.nikonusa.com](http://www.nikonusa.com)), lists for \$899.95—but even D-SLRs (digital SLRs) are more affordable now than they were just a couple of years ago. If you're looking for an SLR, it's a good idea to be certain that this is definitely what your recipient wants because they are far more advanced than compacts.

Where we give prices, these are manufacturers' current list prices. Street prices are often substantially lower, so it pays to shop around.

## Where To Begin?

With all the cameras out there to choose from, finding the right one may seem like a daunting task. We suggest several models below, but if you prefer to browse widely, you can get a great overview by visiting prominent camera makers' Web sites, looking over their lines, and checking potential candidates in the store.

Here are a few good places to start: Canon's PowerShot line ([www.canonusa.com](http://www.canonusa.com)), with

more than 20 models; Nikon's Coolpix line, with 16 models; Pentax's Optio line ([www.pentaximaging.com](http://www.pentaximaging.com)), with 17 models; and Sony's Cyber-shot line ([www.sonystyle.com](http://www.sonystyle.com)), with almost 20 models. All of these manufacturers feature compact or semi-compact models, which are great for today's busy lifestyle.

If your head starts to spin from too many choices, and you just want to consider a couple of good, best-bet cameras that won't break the bank, look no farther than Nikon's Coolpix 7900 (\$399.95) and Canon's PowerShot SD300 (\$349.95). Both of these come from some of the most respected manufacturers in the business and rank high in overall customer satisfaction. The 4MP PowerShot SD300 is a solid choice for someone who wants to point and shoot without a lot of arcane controls and menu choices getting in the way. Also aimed at the point-and-shoot enthusiasts, the 7MP Coolpix 7900 will take larger pictures and has a wider range of scene mode presets to optimize performance.

**The latest advance in digicams.** If you're shopping for someone who loves having the newest technological developments, have a look at Nikon's new Coolpix P1 and P2. These are the world's first cameras that feature built-in Wi-Fi capability. The 8MP black P1 (\$549.95) and the 5.1MP silver P2 (\$399.95) are each roughly the size of an iPod and have a range of about 100 feet. Check the online specs before you buy, however; their Wi-Fi implementation is more limited than what you may be used to with gadgets such as PDAs.

Whether you're after the latest features or simply a good camera for basic snapshots, start your shopping early instead of waiting until the last minute to make your choice. The field of dream cameras isn't getting any narrower. 

BY BRIAN HODGE





## Meet our expert Julie

Home A/V Editor, [CrutchfieldAdvisor.com](http://CrutchfieldAdvisor.com)

*"Just about every day, I come across a cool product which strikes me as perfect for someone I know. I've shared some of my favorites here."*

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## Expert picks



### FAR-OUT DIGITAL SHOOTING

#### Canon PowerShot S2 IS

"The PowerShot S2 IS is a great camera with an exceptional stand out: a 12X zoom lens with image stabilization. With that zoom, you've got four times the zoom capability of most point-and-shoot digital cameras. And with image stabilization, you avoid the blurry images that are so common with extensive zoom."

Canon PowerShot S2 IS  
#280PSS2IS



### CAR VIDEO, WHENEVER YOU WANT IT

#### Audiovox D1210

"What I like best about the D1210 is that it's not permanent. You can

hook it up for trips, and let your backseat audience enjoy movies on the 10" screen all the way to the beach. And then you can tuck it away until the next outing."

Audiovox D1210 #220D1210



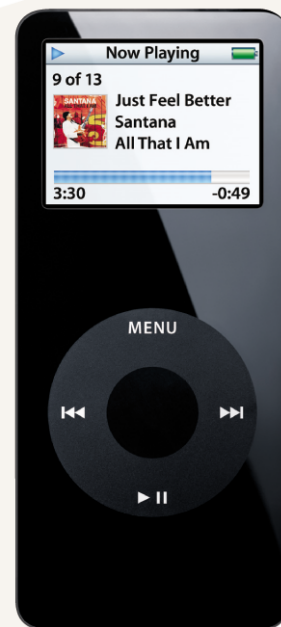
### SLIMMED-DOWN MUSIC TO GO

#### Apple iPod nano

"Everything Apple had to say about the nano is true — these things are just plain cool. They work like larger iPods — which is to say they make it easy to listen to hours and hours of music — but they've got a super-slim design and a beautiful color screen to boot. And there are plenty of accessories you can choose to spice up the look of your nano."

2GB Apple iPod nano  
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Black #4722GNANOB

4GB Apple iPod nano  
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Black #4724GNANOB



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# MP3 Players

Do You Hear What I Hear?

**W**hatever your age or lifestyle, we're willing to bet our own precious iPod that someone on your holiday shopping list (maybe even you) is wishing for a new MP3 player this season. But which one is right for you—or him? And how much should you spend?

All year long vendors have been introducing more and more MP3 players in a dizzying range of sizes, shapes, colors, and formats, which come with an even more bewildering array of features. Some can track your speed and distance while you run, play stereo quality sound from your home sound system, and some (such as the Motorola ROKR E1, \$249; [www.motorola.com](http://www.motorola.com)) can even make phone calls. If there is any place other than shoe shopping where one-size-fits-all does *not* apply, it's MP3 player shopping.

As with shoe shopping, you'll want to do your best to find just the right fit for your budget. Your purchase should take into account the personality, lifestyle, and realistic needs of the person for whom you're shopping. You wouldn't give pink Manolo Blahniks to your daughter to wear during her triathlon training runs, and you probably shouldn't give her a pink 60GB iPod to take on them either.



## Player Pros & Cons

### Hard Drive Players

**Pros:** They're easy to use, have the largest viewing screens, and you can store all your music (along with some other files) in one place.

**Cons:** They're the largest and heaviest players, they're not skip-proof, and they're more fragile and pricier than flash-based players.

### Micro Hard Drive Players

**Pros:** Smaller and lighter than high-capacity players, they usually hold more files than flash-based models for around the same price.

**Cons:** You get fewer megabytes per dollar than with larger players,

and moving parts limit physical activity. They're also heavier than flash players.

### Flash-Based Players

**Pros:** Small and highly portable with no moving parts, the batteries last longer, and the player won't skip when you're working out. Bonus features often include voice and line-in recording and radio reception.

**Cons:** Although low-priced versions are available, they have the highest per-megabyte cost and the lowest maximum capacities. You can usually store only 500 to 1,000 songs at a time. ★

### Types Of Players

There are essentially three types of MP3 players on the market today: hard drive-based players, micro hard drive-based players, and flash-based players. We refer to all of the players here as MP3 players, but they can also play other digital audio formats, including WMA (Windows Media Audio), WAV, or OGG Vorbis. Although you'll definitely want to consider sound quality, performance, design, capacity, and battery life when selecting the perfect player, first rule out any type of player that wouldn't be well-suited to the person you have in mind. Doing so lets you eliminate whole categories of product and hone in more quickly on finding the perfect player.

A high-capacity hard drive player is likely to be able to accommodate every song you'll ever own. Hard drive players generally hold between 5 and 30GB, and large players, such as the 60GB iPod, can accommodate around 17,000 songs (assuming an average size of 3.5MB per

file). The downside is that these players are also the largest, heaviest, and most fragile. They are ideal for listening to while commuting on a train, riding on an airplane, studying at your desk, or walking through the park. They are not the best choice for working out with because, when jostled, the spinning hard drive inside can skip—and if you drop it, you can break it, causing you to lose several hundred dollars' worth of gear and potentially thousands of songs.

Hard drive players are the perfect gift for sedentary students, folks with long commutes, and people who pride themselves on their extensive music collections. We recommend the iPod (20GB \$299, 60GB \$399; [www.ipod.com](http://www.ipod.com)) or the Dell DJ (20GB \$199, 30GB \$299; [www.dell.com](http://www.dell.com)).

Micro hard drive-based players aim for a happy medium. They use miniature hard drives (about 1 inch in diameter compared to 1.8 inches for most full-sized hard drive players) and offer respectable

capacities that generally top out at around 6GB, although some go as high as 20GB, such as the iRiver H10 we mention later. These drives are significantly smaller and lighter than their larger hard drive counterparts but can often hold more music than flash-based models available at the same price. Portability is a plus, but the moving internal parts are a liability if you want to be physically active with them—or if you're just a klutz.

Buy a micro hard drive-based player for someone who wants several thousand songs (or several audio books) at her fingertips, but who doesn't need her entire music collection on hand everywhere she goes in order to be happy. A micro hard drive player makes an excellent gift for someone who travels for business or has a long commute. Compact and lightweight, it's easy to carry but has a high enough capacity to easily fill a week's worth of train rides into the city or a flight across the country. We are fond of the Creative Zen Micro (4GB \$179.99, 5GB \$199.99, and 6GB \$229; [www.creative.com](http://www.creative.com)) and the iRiver H10 (5GB \$249.99, 20 GB \$299.99; [www.iriver.com](http://www.iriver.com)).

Flash-based players are the players that athletes, skateboarders, adventure travelers, and casual listeners should go for. They have no moving parts and use the same type of memory you'll find in your digital camera, which makes them completely shockproof. Because there's no need to accommodate an internal hard drive, they come in a variety of shapes and sizes, and their ultracompact design makes them highly portable. The only drawback: Most flash players feature 2GB or less of storage, and because of the tiny size, navigating menus and seeing the screen is sometimes more of a challenge than with larger players.

We were sad to learn that some of our favorite players for athletes are no longer being made. Rio produced high-quality,



## ★ holiday gift guide ★

affordable flash players, but the company announced in August it would leave the digital audio market. Ditto Nike. It had teamed up with Philips to offer the near-perfect MP3 Run, which was discontinued this fall. Philips plans to carry on without Nike and introduce its own new Active line of flash players, which are expected to be very similar to the MP3 Run and are designed for (primarily female) athletes. In the meantime, we recommend the Sony psyc Network Walkman (512MB \$99.95; [www.sony.style.com](http://www.sony.style.com)) and the Sony Network Walkman (512MB \$129.95; [www.sony.style.com](http://www.sony.style.com)).

Because they are so affordable, you may want to buy a small flash-based drive for workouts and invest in a nice, big

### Listen Up

Most of the headphones that ship with MP3 players are mediocre at best. If you do one thing for the music lover in your life this holiday season, buy her the Shure E4c headphones (\$299; [www.shure.com](http://www.shure.com)). These sound-isolating earphones create a listening experience, which is the next best thing to actually being *inside* a song. The earplug-like design almost totally eliminates background noise, so you can listen at lower volumes in noisy places, such as airports, city sidewalks, or buses—or tactfully tune out chatty roommates or co-workers. Be forewarned, however, if your sweetheart or teenager opens a pair of these on Christmas morning, he or she is not likely to speak to you again for hours. Listening to music with these earphones, which almost completely block out all other sound, is so sublime that the rest of the world will immediately disappear. ★



hard drive-based model for more sedate use. Creative's MuVo line offers high-quality flash-based players for as little as \$49. We particularly like the Creative Zen Nano Plus (512MB \$119; [www.creative.com](http://www.creative.com)) and the MuVo TX FM (128MB \$69; [www.creative.com](http://www.creative.com)).

### How To Shop

Once you've narrowed the field to one of these types of players, it's only a matter of selecting the look, feel, and features you like. Talking to friends and co-workers about their music players is a great place to start. Ask them what they love about their players and what they don't. Because all of the major manufacturers (Apple, Dell, Creative, iRiver, MuVo, Samsung, and Sony) make excellent devices, choosing among them is mostly a matter of personal preference.

Your decision will come down to the media type, size, weight, design, feature set, and price point that works best for you. Whenever possible, try on your player for size before you purchase it.

If you like to shop online, a shopping bot site such as PriceGrabber ([www.pricegrabber.com](http://www.pricegrabber.com)) can help you to navigate the maze of options, so you can find the best price on the players you're interested in. Using the Compare feature, you'll be able to do a side-by-side comparison of the players you like.

Whether your budget is \$50 or \$500, there's definitely an MP3 player out there with your—or your loved one's—name on it this season. 

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE



On such a nice day,  
don't you want to go outside and play?



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# Fun Software

You'll Be Glad To Give—And Receive—These Programs



Sometimes the poll numbers don't add up. No, we're not talking about shocking political victories that leave pollsters wondering why their numbers told a different story. Instead, we're pondering a survey Imation ([www.imation.com](http://www.imation.com)) conducted this year that shows that the majority of Americans (54%) take digital photos and almost half (47%) find it easy to edit those photos. Even more people (62%) find it easy to create digital photo albums, scrapbooks, slideshows, and movies.

Yet, according to the survey, less than one-third of Americans actually perform the digital tasks they say are so easy.

The survey didn't probe why that's the case, but we offer this possible cause: Maybe people with digital cameras just don't have the right software to help them create all those easy albums, scrapbooks, and movies to their level of satisfaction.

With the holidays knocking on your front door, consider giving a gift of software—

a program that will help your friend or loved one finally get around to that special project she's always been meaning to do.

## Dig These Digital Apps

The PhotoPlus 10 Studio Pack from Serif (\$79.99; [www.serif.com](http://www.serif.com)) contains both the powerful editing features in PhotoPlus, as well as the organizing and presentation tools of AlbumPlus 4. In addition, you get a DVD full of extras, such as project ideas, samples, and 500 royalty-free photos.

You'll flip over the patented 3D page-flipping interface that is the backbone of E-Book Systems' ([www.ebooksys.com](http://www.ebooksys.com)) FlipAlbum programs. With these apps, you can create digital photo albums with pages that you can set to turn manually or automatically. You also can personalize albums with text, design themes, and background music. The FlipAlbum line has three programs: FlipAlbum 6 Standard (\$39.95), Suite (\$69.95), and Pro (\$159.95).

Some programs go beyond just photo editing. Roxio is one of the biggest names in the digital media software field, and its Easy Media Creator is a good choice for anyone who wants to edit photos and burn CDs and DVDs. The new Easy Media Creator 8 (\$99.95; [www.roxio.com](http://www.roxio.com)) builds on its predecessors with a

## ★ holiday gift guide ★



redesigned interface; new tools, such as Task Assistants, to make projects easier to complete; and added features. Use LiveShare to let your friends view your photos via peer-to-peer technology, for instance, or create an audio CD from a DVD video. You also can create high-definition slideshows and videos.

Nero is another top name in digital media programs. It just released Nero 7 Ultra Edition (\$99.99; [www.nero.com](http://www.nero.com)), which features 18 new or updated applications plus an improved StartSmart screen. You can edit videos you shot using your camcorder, create customized DVDs, burn audio CDs, edit photos, create slideshows with soundtracks, and back up and compress data—to name but a few functions.

We won't promise it will turn you into the next Steven Spielberg, but CyberLink's PowerDirector 4 (\$69.95; [www.gocyberlink.com](http://www.gocyberlink.com)) puts some heavy-duty movie-making tools into your hands. You can enhance colors, filter out noise, add soundtracks and special effects, and use the auto-condensing feature to turn any long home video into a clip your friends really will want

to see. Oh, and PowerDirector will work on your digital images, too.

### Hobbies & Crafts

Scrapbookers and craft lovers will like the titles from Nova Development. Scrapbook Factory Deluxe 3.0 (\$39.95; [www.novadevelopment.com](http://www.novadevelopment.com)) contains

everything you need to preserve your favorite memories, from templates to photo embellishments. The company also offers Art Explosion (\$29.95 and up), a series of programs with hundreds of thousands of clip art images. Or choose T-Shirt Factory 3.0 (\$29.95), which can help you make unique gifts or provide your kids' clubs or teams with uniforms.

## For Language Lovers

Online educational courses are among the many benefits the Internet and PCs make possible. Chalk up language as one of the many fields of study you can undertake at home.

To help you pick the right language program for yourself, determine what your goals are and how you learn best. Peruse the Web sites of the following software makers. You'll find numerous languages offered, a variety of teaching methods and tools, and programs geared for learners of all levels.

**Auralog**  
[www.auralog.com](http://www.auralog.com)

This company's premium collection of programs, the Tell Me More series (\$195), is available in Spanish, French, German, Italian, English, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic. Each title contains 750 hours of comprehensive lessons for beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners. Lessons are divided into workshops that sharpen written, oral, grammar, and vocabulary skills. Advanced learners can enroll in further studies through the Auralog Web site.

**Rosetta Stone**  
[www.rosettastone.com](http://www.rosettastone.com)

You'll find lessons in 29 languages through the packaged software

(starting at \$195 for Level 1 studies) and online courses (starting at \$49.95 for a monthly subscription). Lessons were developed using the Dynamic Immersion method, an approach that tries to teach students to learn a foreign language in the same way they learned their native tongues.

**Topics Entertainment**  
[www.topics-ent.com](http://www.topics-ent.com)

The Instant Immersion line of language lessons (\$29.99) comes in three levels: Instant Immersion 2.0 for beginners and Instant Immersion Deluxe (\$49.99) and Platinum (\$99.99) editions. The latter two contain both CD-ROMs for your PC and audio CDs.

**Transparent Language**  
[www.transparent.com](http://www.transparent.com)

Pick lessons from among dozens of languages and many types of programs depending on your desired level of learning. For instance, you can learn Swahili under The Languages of the World line (\$19.95) or German, French, Russian, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese through the Say It In series (\$69.95). The immersion program, Learn Language Now! (\$39.95), is available in more than a dozen tongues, or you can opt for complete suites of programs (\$99.95) for a handful of languages. ★



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Save money and express your creativity with a card-creating program, such as Broderbund's venerable Print Shop, now in its 21st edition (\$29.99; [www.broderbund.com](http://www.broderbund.com)). In addition to greeting cards, you can create calendars, crafts, and just about anything into which you want to incorporate your photos. Print Shop comes with thousands of project ideas, photos, graphics, and art to use.



A practical gift for any friend who loves to travel is Street Atlas USA 2006, from DeLorme (\$49.95; [www.delorme.com](http://www.delorme.com)). The updated maps and noted places of interest will help anyone prepare for a trip. Load Street Atlas into your laptop, connect DeLorme's Earthmate GPS LT-20 (\$99.95, which includes Street Atlas USA 2006) to it, and you've created a

Global Positioning System tracking device to take with you.

Though you can categorize it as a digital photo editor, corefx Three Level (\$54.95; [www.core-learning.com](http://www.core-learning.com)) will appeal to art lovers of all ages. It offers basic tools such as crayons and paints for drawing, as well as more advanced

features for editing and enhancing images and creating art work and animations for Web sites or desktop publishing projects. Visit the Core Learning Web site to take a program tour or download a free demo.

### Try Before You Buy

We wish all companies offered free demos of their software, as Core Learning does. Before ordering any program, be sure to visit the software maker's Web site to get more information. Even if there's no trial version available, you can at least double-check to make sure the destination PC meets all the system requirements for the program and see if the company is offering online-exclusive deals. 

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

## Kid-Friendly Programs

If you're going to let your children use the computer—especially younger ones who don't need the PC for homework—providing them with age-appropriate programs makes sense. (See "Kids & Technology" p. 68.) Here are titles from trusted software makers.

### Reader Rabbit

The Learning Company  
[www.learningcompany.com](http://www.learningcompany.com)

The Reader Rabbit Early Learning System (\$29.99), for ages 3 to 5, can help your little ones learn to read confidently. This program has flashcards, alphabet stickers, and print-and-go games and worksheets.

**JumpStart Advanced Learning System**  
Knowledge Adventure  
[www.jumpstart.com](http://www.jumpstart.com)

The JumpStart Advanced Learning System teaches youngsters fundamental skills in reading, math, art, and science. It tailors programs to toddlers and preschoolers and runs through the sixth grade level. Each three-CD set (\$29.99), teaches more than 50 skills and offers more than 35 activities. JumpStart also has standalone titles, including JumpStart Typing (\$19.99) and JumpStart Spanish (\$19.99), geared for ages 4 to 7.

### Carmen Sandiego

The Learning Company  
[www.learningcompany.com](http://www.learningcompany.com)

Designed to teach geography to children ages 8 through 12, these educational games make youngsters chase the elusive Carmen Sandiego and her gang all over the map. At each stop, kids learn about its historical and cultural significance. Titles include Where In

The U.S.A. Is Carmen Sandiego? (\$19.99), Where In The World Is Carmen Sandiego? (\$19.99), and Carmen Sandiego's Great Chase Through Time (\$19.99).

### DK Software

Global Software Publishing  
[www.learnatglobal.com](http://www.learnatglobal.com)

Well-respected Dorling Kindersley programs cover subjects, including science. My First Amazing Science Explorer (\$19.99), ages 5 to 9, and I Love Science (\$19.99), ages 7 to 11, introduces kids to the scientific principles they encounter daily in the world. To learn about their anatomy, kids ages 6 to 10 can play games with Seemore Skinless in My Amazing Human Body (\$19.99). Older kids, ages 11 and up, can explore the deep in Encyclopedia Of Our Living Oceans (\$29.99). ★

# What Gift For Whom?

Gift Ideas For Stumped Shoppers

It happens every year, to almost all of us. The holidays approach with exponentially increasing speed, and for every day we check off the calendar with an ominous X, we're only compounding the source of our anxiety: that person on our list who's impossible to shop for.

You know the type. They never know what they want. Or they know, but love playing coy. Or they'll drop one hint, but it's for something so miniscule that if that's all you give them, you'll look like a cheapskate.

We've been there, and we're here to help. Following are six kinds of people you might be shopping for, with a suggestion that just may make their holidays merry and bright. 

BY BRIAN HODGE





# ★ holiday gift guide ★



## Who: Father



Whether your dad is a rugged outdoorsman or sticks to well-traveled pavement, he probably

has one thing in common with virtually all other members of his gender: He likes knowing exactly where he is at all times and will go to heroic lengths to project that image even when circumstances suggest otherwise. He can't help it. It's a primal thing.

**What:** Garmin Etrex GPS (\$106.24; [www.garmin.com](http://www.garmin.com))

GPS stands for global positioning system, and handheld GPS devices maintain tracking contact with orbiting satellites—in this case up to 12—to pinpoint one's position on Earth. At 4 x 2 inches (HxW) and weighing 6 ounces, the Etrex is about the size of a cell phone.

**Why:** We've yet to hear of a man who hasn't quickly come to love a GPS, even if he never thought he needed one. The Etrex stores 500 waypoints and 10 paths, so your dad can always find his way back to where he started. It's also compatible with Garmin's optional MapSource software, so Pop can plan out a trip ahead of time.

Having a GPS means never having to ask for directions—at least not from another human being. ★



## Who: Mother



Most of us think of dads as the tech members of the family and moms as more into house-

ware, plants, and clothing. Think again. In a CEA (Consumer Electronics Association) gift survey, nearly two-thirds of the mothers queried said they'd prefer a digital camera to diamond earrings. We cover cameras elsewhere in this issue, and overall, moms have a different priority, with a stated preference for things that will help them stay connected to family and friends.

**What:** Motorola Talkabout 5820AA (\$159.99; [www.motorola.com/us](http://www.motorola.com/us))

Think of these as pocket-sized walkie-talkies. They run on three AA batteries and allow communication on any of 22 channels, in frequencies designated as GMRS (General Mobile Radio Service) and FRS (Family Radio Service). Shop around: You'll find them sub-\$100.

**Why:** Mom can keep one and hand the other over to anyone she wants to keep in contact with when cell phones aren't possible or practical. They have a 5-mile range (with unobstructed sightlines, at least), so they're good for both indoor and outdoor uses, including on ski slopes or hiking trails, during trips to the mall, or around the neighborhood. ★



## Who: Boss



Bosses come with all kinds of personalities and work habits, but most have an eye for tools

that will help them get more done during the day . . . or at least do things more conveniently. If the gadget consolidates functions or has an "oooh, ahhh" factor, so much the better because everybody loves to slap them onto the tabletop during meetings.

**What:** Olympus WS-300M Digital Voice Recorder (\$149.99; [www.olympusamerica.com](http://www.olympusamerica.com))

The W-300M has 256MB of built-in memory, which provides enough space for 68 hours of recording time, but it doesn't stop there. It also plays MP3 and WMA music files, and the main body separates from the battery section, so you can plug it into a USB port, serving as a flash RAM storage device.

**Why:** The WS-300M is voice activated, so it's always on standby when your boss needs it, without unnecessarily draining its AAA battery. In addition to the music and storage options, one feature your boss may especially appreciate is the variable speed playback—25% slower or 50% faster—so she can more easily follow what's been said or zip through the less important parts. ★

Courtesy of Apple

## Who: Teenage girl



What are some descriptive phrases we apply to most teenage girls? Status conscious? Sure.

Style conscious? You bet. Plugged into cultural avatars such as “American Idol”? Totally. If only a gift that encompassed all three . . .

**What:** iPod shuffle (\$99 and \$129; [www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com))

About the size of a pack of gum, the shuffle is a flash-RAM (that is, no hard drive) version of the world’s most popular portable music player. It’s available in 512KB and 1GB sizes, which translates into space for about 120 and 240 songs, respectively.

**Why:** We’ve said it before: When it comes to digital music players, there’s the iPod, and there’s everything else. Manufacturers may pack in more features—an FM radio tuner—but no one has bettered the iPod when it comes to its core function of playing digital music.

Because the shuffle is worn front-and-center on a neck cord, it’s more than just a music player. It’s a fashion accessory and a status symbol. Plus there are plenty of colorful third-party cords, cases, and stickers available, so she can personalize the shuffle to her heart’s content. ★



## Who: Teenage boy



Now a few words on this member of the species: Sullen. Withdrawn. Equally prone to fits of inar-

ticulate angst and flights of profundity. To sum it all up: moody. He loves music as much as his sister does, but with all of that going on inside, sometimes it’s gotta be just him and his tunes.

**What:** Sony MDR-7506 headphones (\$130; [www.sonyusa.com](http://www.sonyusa.com))

These headphones have a 10-foot coiled cord and a stereo Uni-match plug. Pop off the 1/4-inch tip, and there’s a 1/8-inch mini-jack that will fit computers and portable players.

**Why:** The planet’s full of headphones, so what sets this pair apart? Sony has a knack for coming up with industry standards that are relatively low priced.

The MDR-7506’s are considered professional gear rather than consumer merchandise. But for many musicians, studio engineers, and others who know their reputation, they’re still the headphones of choice for home listening because of their reliability and crisp, detailed sound. As an added bonus, the earpads are easy to replace if they wear out; teenage boys can be a bit rough on things. ★



## Who: iPod owner



The iPod’s domination of the portable music market keeps steamrolling along, with tens of millions

of iPod owners out there. But the player itself is only the beginning—the accessory market is an industry unto itself. If you have an iPod, you can never have too many add-ons to make the experience even sweeter.

**What:** Belkin TuneSync (\$59.99; [www.belkin.com](http://www.belkin.com))

A 2-in-1 accessory, the TuneSync cleverly integrates an iPod dock with a 5-port USB 2.0 hub.

**Why:** An iPod dock is a convenient way of connecting your iPod to your PC for charging the battery and managing music. Slip your 3rd generation or later iPod, mini, or nano into the slot and take care of business. A USB hub also gives you more ports and eliminates the need to crawl behind your PC when you want to connect something new.

What better way to reduce desktop clutter than to consolidate these two accessories into a single unit? We’re amazed that nobody’s thought of this until now. The TuneSync polishes things off by adding a third function: a stereo-out 1/8-inch mini-jack that you can connect to a stereo, powered speakers, or headphones. ★



# Top Guy Gifts

What The Man In Your Life Really Wants

It would be nice to believe “It’s the thought that counts” is a panacea for that not-quite-right gift, but being upstaged by your man’s grandmother and her gift of hand-knit socks because you bought him the wrong digital music player can be a holiday disaster on the scale of when Uncle Ned wouldn’t lay off the eggnog. To avoid such debacles, you’ll need to discover a part of yourself that might be a little frightening: your inner man.

You may think guys are easy to shop for, but the loudest or biggest gifts don’t always make the best gifts. Take a look at our featured products and tips, and with a little luck, the only thing you’ll have to worry about this holiday season is trying to explain why Uncle Ned is wrestling the plastic lawn Santa again.

## Eye Candy

Whether it’s a new flat panel TV or a premium point-and-shoot digital camera, the devil’s frequently in the details. Avoid becoming wrapped up in the endless walls of TVs on display at big-box retailers and focus on comparing particular specifications.

**Samsung HP-R5072**  
\$5,699 • [www.samsung.com](http://www.samsung.com)

For years, screen burn-in was a serious drawback for plasma TVs. **Watermarks**



## ★ holiday gift guide ★



(translucent logos networks typically included in the bottom-right corner of a broadcast for identification) could burn into the screen and become a permanent image if they were displayed for too long. Trust us; a guy doesn't want an ESPN logo tattooed on his plasma TV.

Samsung's HP-R5072, one of its newest flat-panel plasma TVs, uses Auto Pixel Shift technology to keep the screen pristine and free from burn-in. This makes it pretty stiff competition for LCD TVs, which don't suffer from burn-in but are typically more expensive for similar sized screens. Its 10,000:1 contrast ratio is top notch for plasmas. If this 50-inch beauty is too large, Samsung also has a 42-inch model (\$4,199) available.

**Sharp LC-65D90U AQUOS LC-TV**  
**\$20,999.99 • [www.sharppusa.com](http://www.sharppusa.com)**

You might want to include the cost of a trip to the orthodontist in the LC-65D90U's sticker price because your jaw will surely hit the floor when you see the size of this 65-inch LCD TV. The sets use the latest LCD panels and have a response time of less than 12ms, so you shouldn't experience any motion blur in action movies guys love.

Although it appears advancements in plasma screen technology have solved the burn-in problems, expect prices on LCD TVs to tumble by around \$1,000

during the holiday shopping season, making LCDs more competitive with plasma TVs from a price standpoint.

**Microsoft Xbox 360**  
**\$399 Xbox 360 • \$299 Xbox 360 Core System • [www.xbox.com](http://www.xbox.com)**

If you've kept your ear to the ground of the gaming world, you know that Microsoft beat out rival console makers Sony and Nintendo by having its next-gen console, the Xbox 360, ready for retail shelves this holiday season. By offering the ability to play games in HD (high

definition), the Xbox 360 gives guys an unprecedented gaming experience.

But don't let Microsoft pull the wool over your eyes with its \$299 Core System. A wired controller and composite AV cable are the only accessories included with the Core System. Spend another \$100, and not only will you upgrade to a wireless controller and component HD AV cable, but you'll also get a 20GB hard drive (to save games and play legacy Xbox games), Xbox 360 headset, Ethernet cable (to connect to Xbox Live; a one-year membership is

## Be A Man

Stuck trying to find the right digi-cam among a sea of potential suitors? Afraid a salesperson's siren song will convince you to buy the wrong one? Start with these tips, and you'll be on your way to buying him the CE gift he's always wanted.

**Be sneaky.** You can learn a lot by asking subtle questions or paying attention when he's talking about what he owns. For example, if he complains deep, loud explosions in movies sound flat on his sound system, a powered subwoofer may deliver the punch he wants. If he's recently purchased a digital music player, look for

accessories specifically designed for that product.

**Think twice about The Total Package.** This is particularly true for things such as HTBs (home theaters in a box). If he has a home theater system and wants to upgrade, buy a high-end center channel speaker (or something similar) instead of a mediocre HTB.

**When in doubt, give a gift certificate.** If you're completely lost, a gift certificate to his favorite CE store is a can't-miss gift. He'll have no one to blame but himself if he picks out something less than perfect. ★



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included with both packages), and the Xbox 360 Media Remote.

**Casio Exilim EX-Z750**  
\$449.99 • [www.casio-usa.com](http://www.casio-usa.com)

Without a “European carryall,” toting a bulky digicam along for a night on the town is a huge pain for guys. Fortunately, the leading digital camera manufacturers seem attuned to this need and are producing svelte models that comfortably fit in the back pocket of a pair of jeans. The EX-Z750 starts with slim design but packs an amazing 7.2MP in its tiny frame. That’s enough megapixels to produce striking 8- x 10-inch enlargements of your favorite memories or most notorious exploits.

When shopping for a digicam, avoid falling into the trap of buying more megapixels than your guy needs. (See “Megapixel Madness” on page 56 of the October issue of *CE Lifestyles* for more tips on purchasing digicams.)

## Ear Candy

It’s definitely a bull market for digital music players and mobile phones. Whether he’s grooving to the Rolling Stones’ “A Bigger Bang” or talking with his “nana” in Maine, the man in your life should love these devices.

**Apple iPod nano**  
\$249 (4GB) • \$199 (2GB)  
[www.apple.com/ipodnano](http://www.apple.com/ipodnano)

Steve Jobs, Apple’s CEO, has been laughing all the way to the bank since the debut of the iPod. We hate making bold claims, but the nano might be *the* must-have gift of 2005 for both sexes.

Because the nano uses flash memory, it won’t skip during a workout, and its massive storage capacity holds enough music for a guy with finicky tastes. Add a 1.5-inch color LCD and a pencil-thin frame, and there aren’t too many reasons (other

## Xbox 360 Games

Unless you plan to give the Xbox 360 as an expensive DVD player, Microsoft’s latest gaming console isn’t going to do him much good without a game or two. Some of these games are available on other platforms, but many are Xbox 360-exclusive titles, and all cost \$59.99.

- ★ Perfect Dark Zero
- ★ Project Gotham Racing
- ★ Gears of War
- ★ Tiger Woods PGA Tour 06
- ★ Tom Clancy’s Ghost Recon 3
- ★ Tony Hawk American Wasteland
- ★ Madden NFL 06

than possibly its price compared to most hard drive-based players) not to love it.

**Motorola ROKR E1**  
\$249.99 • [www.motorola.com](http://www.motorola.com)

Having fewer CE devices without sacrificing functionality is a goal of many manufacturers, and Motorola’s ROKR E1 is a perfect example. By incorporating Apple’s iTunes ([www.apple.com/itunes](http://www.apple.com/itunes)) interface into the ROKR E1, Motorola has produced a cell phone that doubles as a digital camera and triples as a digital music player. The ROKR E1 can hold 100 songs (in MIDI, MP3, WAV, and AAC format).

Obviously, the ROKR E1 is a jack of all trades but a master of none. If your guy needs a new cell phone but desperately wants a top-shelf digital music player, the ROKR E1 might not be the compromise he’s looking for.

## Brain Candy

The previously mentioned gifts are great when guys want to play hard, but when it’s time to work hard, this hardware makes an unbeatable stocking stuffer.

**Toshiba M45-S359**  
\$1,449.99 • [www.toshiba.com](http://www.toshiba.com)

Toshiba’s Satellite M45-S359 is an affordable notebook with a lot of horsepower under its hood. Because it uses a 2GHz Intel Pentium M processor, he’ll be able to enjoy longer battery life without sacrificing too much processing power. A 100GB hard drive provides plenty of space for all of his files, and Toshiba’s DVD SuperMulti optical drive is one of the most versatile drives on the market.

The M45-S359 isn’t the lightest notebook around, but it shouldn’t break his back. At \$1,449.99, it shouldn’t break your bank account, either.

**Lexar JumpDrive Lightning 1GB**  
\$129.99 • [www.lexar.com](http://www.lexar.com)

If lugging around a notebook computer is too impractical, consider purchasing a USB flash drive to move a lot of data in a hurry. Lexar’s JumpDrive Lightning 1GB flash drive is a little pricey compared to other USB flash drives, but it’s awfully fast and has a shiny stainless steel exterior that sets it apart from its peers. Lexar even throws in free laser engraving if you buy the drive from its online store, letting you add a personal touch if you give it as a gift.

## ’Tis The Season For CE

These are some of our quick picks for CE products that should add a little cheer to your guy’s holidays, but it’s far from an exhaustive list. Take a look at the “Be A Man” sidebar for a few general tips about finding a guy’s dream gift.

And in case that man in your life happens to be Uncle Ned, nothing says “Happy Holidays” like a personal digital breathalyzer. 

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BY VINCE COGLEY

# ARTCOUSTIC™



Speakers featured:  
• DF65-50 left & right w/ Getty art screens  
• DF-Multi L+C+R center w/ ivory fabric

Because the way your environment *looks* is often more important than the way it *sounds*, music and movie lovers often sacrifice performance for aesthetics.

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ARTCOUSTIC brings both high performance sound and style together in one harmonious and elegant solution.

ARTCOUSTIC loudspeakers and subwoofers are THIN – as slim as 2.5 inches – and hang on the wall like pictures.

Interchangeable, acoustically transparent front screens are covered in a choice of elegant fabrics, or can also be printed with artwork or photography to complement any décor. The cabinet frames come in a choice of finishes, as well.

Explore the world of ARTCOUSTIC - 14 different speaker & subwoofer models, plus thousands of screen choices - and discover what interior designers, architects, and audio lovers have in common - [www.ArtcousticUSA.com](http://www.ArtcousticUSA.com)



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# Think Outside The Box

CE Gifts Sure To Please

**A**lthough digital cameras, camcorders, and music players all make great gifts, sometimes it's nice to think outside the box. If you're looking for unique gifts this holiday season but still want to keep it electronic, read on because we've got suggestions that will get you thinking and make anyone on your list a happy, techie camper.

## Share The Beat

Chances are you know someone with a portable music player. At the rate they're popping up, you probably know several people who own one. Earbuds have practically become an accessory among all types of people, from students to professionals. Regardless of what portable music player those on your gift list favor, they will appreciate your thoughtfulness when you give them the option of going earbud-free. With a portable speaker system, there is no need to be tethered to a device as the lone listener.

Altec Lansing's inMotion iM4 (\$99.95; [www.alteclansing.com](http://www.alteclansing.com)) lets you ditch the wires, so your friends can enjoy the music with you. Measuring 1 x 10.25 x 5.3 inches (HxWxD) and weighing just 28 ounces, the iM4 can easily go anywhere. And there's no need to plug in; pop in four AAA batteries, and you'll be able to jam to 18 hours of music.



## One For All

For the home-theater junkie in your life, what could be better than the gift of simplicity? Having a home theater means having multiple components, each with its own remote control. (Step 1: find remote, turn on TV; Step 2: find remote, turn on DVD player; Step 3: find remote, turn on stereo; etc.) It's entirely possible that it could take more time to get everything set up and ready to play the movie than it does to cook the perfect bag of microwave popcorn to go with it.

With a universal remote control, such as Logitech's Harmony 520 Advanced Universal Remote (\$99.99; [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)), you have the ability to control every aspect of your home-theater system with one, programmable remote. No more searching under couch cushions for the right remote; now when you find one, you've found them all.

## Go Hands Free

As convenient as cellular phones are, they can be tricky to handle while multitasking. And the shrinking profile of phones has made the art of sandwiching your phone between your ear and shoulder even more challenging. In fact, the frustration of trying to manipulate a mobile phone may have been the original inspiration for the hands-free headset.

However they came to be, we love them, and we think there's probably

## Shopping Tips

**B**uying CE accessories as gifts can be tricky business unless you know exactly what devices your intended recipient owns. It may pay to do a little investigative work before making your purchase. Ask questions during casual conversation to find out her PDA's model number or which operating system she uses on her computer. Or, do a little harmless snooping to ensure compatibility with your gift idea. (Just don't cross any privacy boundaries while doing it.)

Once you find the perfect CE gift, complete it by including all the extras such as batteries or necessary peripherals (including cords or cables). The happy receiver will be even more excited when he realizes he can use your perfect gift immediately. And he's sure to thank you for it. ★

more than one person on your gift list who would love one, too. If you're looking for a corded model, consider Etymotic's ETY-COM Handsfree Mobile Phone Headset (\$69; [www.etymotic.com](http://www.etymotic.com)). With its "noise-isolating earphone and noise-rejecting directional microphone technologies," the ETY-COM frees up your hands and actually enables you to hear and be heard better than using your cell phone alone. And it may also be compatible with your landline's cordless phone. (Check Etymotic's Web site for a list of compatibility information for both cellular and cordless phones.)

If you'd prefer to give the gift of wireless freedom, check out Plantronics' Voyager 510 Bluetooth Headset (\$99.95; [www.plantronics.com](http://www.plantronics.com)). Dishing out up to six hours of talk time or 100 hours of standby time, this headset can go on and on (much like the Energizer Bunny), and you can be as far as 33 feet away from your phone while using it. With one button, you can answer or hang up, redial the last number called, or use voice-activated dialing. Nice. Very nice. (To check compatibility with your phone, try out the Will This Work With My Existing Phone? feature on the product page.)

## Type With Ease

Portability is essential in the world of CE. We are armed with PDAs and smartphones, which are the ideal way to stay connected while on the move. But, if you've ever had to enter more than a few notes into your device, you know what a pain it can be. Sometimes portable and practical just don't mix. Now they do.

Ditch the stylus and slip a Stowaway Portable Keyboard from Think Outside ([www.thinkoutside.com](http://www.thinkoutside.com)) into your briefcase instead. Think Outside offers product-specific portable keyboards for Palm, iPAQ, Sony, and BlackBerry devices that range in price from \$29.99 to \$99.99. But for compatibility with nearly any Bluetooth-enabled device, look no further than the Stowaway Universal Bluetooth Keyboard (\$149.99). This full-sized QWERTY keyboard folds up to a mere 5.5 x 3.9 x 0.5 inches, weighs only 6 ounces, and runs on two AAA batteries.

## Give With A Smile

While trying to match the perfect CE gift to recipient this holiday season, remember that practical is a good thing. With a little thought, you may come up with the one thing they can't live without, but never knew they needed. 

BY JOY MARTIN





# Editor's Top 10

Reasons I Love The Holidays

Our Christmas cheer spills over as *CE Lifestyles* editor Katie Sommer shares why she loves everything about the holidays.

**1** What other holiday spans three months?

**2** Holiday parties are the perfect place to show off your new Sonos Digital Music System (\$1,199 for Introductory Bundle; [www.sonos.com](http://www.sonos.com)) with classic carols during dinner.



**3** During Hanukkah, you can lavish eight days of CE goodies on that special person in your life.

**4** You know that MP3 player you've had your eye on? It *would* be fantastic for your husband. . .

**5** You can take a family picture with your digital camera, create your

Christmas cards with it on your computer, and print them out on your photo printer all in the same day.

**6** Simplify your holiday dinner preparations by using devices such as your cell phone to alert you to when your cookies are



done, a remote thermometer to tell you when your turkey is at the proper internal temperature, and your laptop and a cooking CD-ROM to see how Julia Child prepared her famous croissants.

**7** If your sister isn't able to make it home for the holidays this year, you can still make her feel like part of the celebration by emailing her Christmas-day photos you take with



your cell phone. Use a smartphone such as the Treo 650 (\$299; [www.palm.com](http://www.palm.com)), which has a large screen that is perfect for

capturing just the right shot of your mom's gorgeous Christmas tree.

**8** There's no such thing as too much of anything in December.

**9** One of the only times of year that you'll find great discounts on hot electronic devices is on Black Friday.

**10** Using a digital camcorder to record your kids opening their gifts is always a great way to remember their reactions to them, but it is also an excellent historical record of what gifts were hot for a certain year. ★





## Cool accessories.

Audiovox is always close to her heart. She loves her Audiovox MP3 Player with FM tuner. Her well-rounded DVD Player with built-in video games. And the big, blue display of her XM Satellite Radio with FM modulator is always nearby. Accessorize your life with Audiovox. Go to [www.audiovox.com](http://www.audiovox.com) or call 1-800-645-4994.



MP3 Player



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## Tips

### Personalize Your Gift Wrap



#### Get Creative

You've put loads of thought into buying the perfect gift; you don't want run-of-the-mill wrapping paper and tags, do you? You can easily personalize the outside of your presents with digital photos. For a basic but very sophisticated look, print a photograph that has special significance to the person you're giving a gift, and make the dimensions large enough to cover up the entire top of the box. (Make sure the resolution allows for this.) You could also leave some space around the photo and add a favorite quote, a memorable poem, or lines from a song that mean something to both of you.



#### Stick 'Em Together

One person. So many memories. Which one do you choose? Fortunately, you don't have to. Instead, make a collage. Wrap your gift using a plain roll of wrapping paper and then glue copies of your favorite pictures all over it. By making the collage on the already wrapped gift, you avoid having to fold pictures into the creases on the side while wrapping, as you could have to do if you put the pictures on the paper before fitting it to the size of your box.



#### You Don't Always Have To Use Paper

You can transfer photos onto almost any kind of fabric, and all you need is a photo printer and a piece of cloth—preferably white or light-colored. You



can buy iron-on T-shirt transfers from your local computer stationery store, craft shop, or your printer manufacturer's Web site. Once you've printed the image onto the T-shirt transfer, iron it onto the cloth and wrap your gift, placing the picture on top of the box. Add an extra special touch by decorating with beads, glitter, and other accessories. You can also vary the type of cloth depending on the kind of person you're giving the gift to. Use torn denim for your old college buddies, pink cotton for your girly best friend, or purple silk for your mother.



#### Can It

Tin containers of any kind, such as coffee cans, can be a wonderful way to package gifts, and it's not hard to decorate them with your favorite pictures. Get any tin container, cover it with reprints of pictures (either in the form of a collage or

just a large picture that covers it entirely), and cover it with laminating paper, which acts as a seal, or decoupage the pictures to the can. Now you can fill it up with whatever you want—chocolates, cookies, stationery items, or anything else you can fit in there.



#### Accent The Wrapping Paper's Design

Head to the nearest store specifically in search of gift wrap with a simple design that has lots of empty space. For instance, you might find one with huge polka dots. Great! Get that. Cut out some of your pictures in the size and shape of the polka dots and glue them on. You only need a couple of pictures (don't cover all of the polka dots) to accent the wrapping paper's existing design and create a colorful, fun, and stylish gift wrap. 

BY MRIDU KHULLAR

# More Audio. More Video.



Hear Sound All Around

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# Digital Photo Project

BY KATIE SOMMER

## Decorate For Christmas

Each month we'll explain how to create something fun, stylish, and useful with your favorite photos and some easy-to-find craft supplies. What better way to celebrate the holidays than with reminders of friends and family? This month, we'll show you how to deck your halls with festive, custom decorations: a photo ornament and photo garland.

### Photo Ornament



#### SUPPLIES

- ▲ Clear glass ornament (one with flat or almost-flat sides work best; we used one that is disc-shaped)
- ▲ Favorite photo
- ▲ Acrylic paint
- ▲ Decoupage
- ▲ Glue
- ▲ Any decorative trim, such as ribbon

First, remove the top of your ornament. Then, squeeze a small amount of paint into the ornament and swirl it around. Add another small amount and swirl and do this until the entire inside is coated with paint. Let it dry completely.

Meanwhile, scan your photo at a high resolution (we used 600dpi) and resize it to be proportionate to your ornament. Print your photo

on normal office paper and cut out the area you want on your ornament.

Use decoupage to coat the back of the photo and the area of the ornament on which you will place the photo. Center the photo on the ornament and press the sides down. Depending on the shape of your ornament and the size of your photo, you might get some creases or small bubbles near the edges of your

photo. It takes some patience, but if you keep smoothing the photo, you will be able to work the creases out. Let it dry completely and then use a damp cloth to scrub away any visible

#### TIPS

- ▲ Smaller photos work best if your ornament is curvy.
- ▲ Make a tag out of pretty vellum and ribbon to date your ornament—just tie it to the lid.
- ▲ Use two different colors of paint for a marbled look.

decoupage, being careful to not get the photo wet.

Next, glue any decorative trim to the ornament. Let your imagination run wild! We love the look of using silver cording to frame the photo, but you could also use ribbon or beads.

Finally, after everything has dried, replace the lid on the ornament and hang it on your Christmas tree.



## Photo Garland

First, use a scanner to edit all your photos to the same size, ideally to around half the size of a 4- x 6-inch print (or around 2 x 3 inches). Next, print them out. You can use either office paper or photo paper, and you can print them in color or black-and-white. (We chose black-and-white for our project.) Cut out your photos with a paper cutter.

Next, choose one color of cardstock to use as the background of

your photo. (A lighter color is best.) With the paper cutter, cut this cardstock to a dimension that is 1/4 inch larger on all sides than your photo. (So, because our photos are 2 x 3 inches, our background cardstock is 2.5 x 3.5 inches.) Center the photos on the cardstock and glue them together.

Then, cut a different color of cardstock to dimensions that are 3/4 inch bigger on all sides than the background cardstock (so ours is

4 x 5 inches). Decide how you want the order of your photos and then glue the photo and background to these "frames." We like the look of alternating green and red frames for the Christmas season.

Next, position the hole punch halfway down the left and right edges of these frames and cut holes for the ribbon. Then, thread the ribbon through so that it goes behind the photo and comes out each end. Thread the same piece of ribbon through all the photos so they're connected.

Finally, display the photo garland with your holiday garland. Depending on the length of your ribbon, you could wind the photo garland around the holiday garland or tuck it into the front of it.

## SUPPLIES

- ▲ Favorite photos
- ▲ Cardstock
- ▲ 1/2-inch ribbon
- ▲ Glue
- ▲ Hole punch
- ▲ Paper cutter
- ▲ Holiday garland

## TIPS

▲ Photo garland looks especially good draped across your fireplace's mantle.

▲ Make your garland from only this year's photos and thread them in chronological order. When the holidays are over, store them in an acid-free photo box with yearly dividers. In a few years, you'll have a great collection of your favorite photos organized by year that you can display in very unique ways.



# Affordable & Friendly Digital SLRs

## Just Right Or Too Much?



Until a couple of years ago, the term affordable D-SLR (digital single-lens reflex) was more of an oxymoron than a reality. But in 2003, when Canon (consumer.usa.canon.com) released the Digital Rebel—the very first digital SLR under \$1,000—a new category of cameras was born. These days, there's barely enough time to review the latest D-SLR's specifications before someone introduces a new model.

The competition among major camera manufacturers to produce attractively priced, consumer-friendly digital SLRs is fierce, and that's good news for anyone who wants to step up to a more sophisticated digital alternative without breaking the bank.

But, some may argue, why spend \$800 or more for a 6MP D-SLR such as the Nikon D50 (\$899.95 with zoom lens, \$649.95 body only; [www.nikonusa.com](http://www.nikonusa.com)), the Pentax \*ist DL (\$799.95 with zoom lens, \$699.95 body only; [www.pentaximaging.com](http://www.pentaximaging.com)), or the 8MP Canon Digital Rebel XT dSLR (\$999.99 with zoom lens; \$899.99 without) when, for half the price, you can get a much smaller and lighter 7MP non-D-SLR such as the Canon PowerShot A620 (\$399.99) or the 8MP Olympus Stylus 800 Digital (\$449.99; [www.olympusamerica.com](http://www.olympusamerica.com)) that offer some of the same features such as manual exposure controls? The short answer is: flexibility.

## Photo Flexibility

At the heart of the D-SLR's flexibility are interchangeable lenses. Rather than being limited to a non-D-SLR camera's zoom range, D-SLR users can choose the lens that best fits their needs—from wide angle to super telephoto and everything in between. There are even special macro lenses that let you get up close and personal with tiny subjects such as butterflies or the stamen of a flower.

While you'll find a macro setting on non-D-SLR digital cameras and some even have 12X optical telephoto capabilities, you're still stuck with whatever lens is built into the camera.

Along with focal length options, SLR lenses offer a greater range of f-stops than non-D-SLR cameras. With more f-stops—f-2.8 to f-22 vs. f-3.5 to f-8.0—you can shoot in lower light and gain greater **depth-of-field** (the area of the photograph—in front of and behind the subject—that's in focus).

The hitch with interchangeable lenses, of course, is that you have to buy them.

And, depending on your needs, accumulating an assortment of lenses can get pricey.

## Performance Plus

Digital camera performance has improved tremendously over the years, but D-SLRs are still the leaders when it comes to speed and responsiveness. With a D-SLR you'll get almost instant start-up, imperceptible shutter lag, robust continuous shooting, and long battery life, so you won't miss spontaneous photo ops or action shots because you're waiting for the camera to wake up or save the image to its media card.

A broader range of shutter speeds also gives D-SLRs the competitive edge. At the high end, shutter speeds of up to 1/4000 to 1/8000 (vs. 1/2000) of a second mean you can freeze even the fastest action shots. Slow shutter speeds—measured in full seconds—and a bulb option (where the shutter remains open as long as it is depressed) are perfect for the long exposures necessary to capture creative night shots or phenomena such as lunar eclipses.

## Feature-Full

Both D-SLR and non-D-SLR models have benefited as technology from higher-end models trickles down to more affordable cameras. But even mid-priced D-SLRs, such as the Canon Digital Rebel XT, the Nikon D50, and the Pentax \*ist DL, offer fuller feature sets than cameras such as the Canon PowerShot A620 or the Olympus Stylus 800 Digital. Although the latter offer manual exposure control using selectable aperture and shutter speed settings, the D-SLRs provide a broader set of options across the board.

Although this new breed of consumer-friendly D-SLRs offers a combination of ease of use—including many of the scene modes found on simpler cameras—and advanced shooting features, there's still more of a learning curve with the higher-end cameras. You can turn any camera, even the most expensive D-SLR, into a point-and-shoot simply by putting it on Program or Auto, but why spend the money on an advanced camera if you're not going to use the features?

# ▶ Accessorize

There are tons of accessories available for D-SLRs, from flashes and filters to underwater housings. But there are a few add-ons that are either necessary or highly recommended to make your D-SLR experience the best it can be:

### FLASH MEDIA CARD

Digital SLRs do not come bundled with a media card, so you'll need to add that to your list. Whether your camera takes CF (CompactFlash) or SD (Secure Digital) cards, we recommend an absolute minimum of 256MB or 512MB; 1GB is ideal. For better performance, go for a high-speed card. We like the SanDisk Extreme III CompactFlash and SD cards (1GB CF card is \$149.99, 1GB SD card is \$139.99; [www.sandisk.com](http://www.sandisk.com)).

**TRIPOD OR MONOPOD** These are handy for shooting in low light.

### A CARD READER

Plug the reader into your computer, and when it comes time to upload your images, remove the card from the camera, plug it into the reader, and you're good to go.

**A CAMERA BAG** (See the "Stow It" sidebar for more information.)

### A CLEANING KIT

The kit should include a cloth and blower brush. Lens coatings are delicate, so don't improvise with a tissue or the hem of your T-shirt to clean them. And never use canned air to clean your camera or lens.

### BATTERIES

An extra proprietary rechargeable battery or, if the camera takes AAs, get two sets of rechargeable NiMH batteries and a charger.





## ▶ Stow It

The main purposes of a camera bag are protection and portability. First, make sure the bag is well-padded and made out of strong material. Beyond that, buying a camera bag can be as daunting as finding the perfect pair of pumps, so before you go shopping, here are a few things to think about:

**CARRYING STYLE** Do you want a backpack (maybe with room for a laptop), or do you prefer a shoulder bag or a waist pack? We like the new Lowepro SlingShot AW (\$79.99 for the smaller 100 AW; \$99.99 for the larger 200 AW; [www.lowepro.com](http://www.lowepro.com)), which is worn like a messenger bag and is as comfortable as a backpack but lets you swing the bag around to the front for quick access to your gear. (It opens from the top.) For shoulder bags, we like the Crumpler Million Dollar Home series ([www.crumplerbags.com](http://www.crumplerbags.com)) because they don't look like your standard camera bag. It's only \$60 for the 3 Million Dollar Home bag, which will accommodate a compact D-SLR and lens.

### SIZE

Is it big enough to hold your camera, lens(es), accessories, and whatever else you want to tote along? Some bags can also be outfitted with extras like a water bottle carrier or cell phone pouch.

### COLOR

Most camera bags come in neutral colors such as black, beige, and khaki. Crumpler offers a wider variety of colors than most, though, including red!

### Portability

Although manufacturers have put D-SLRs on a diet (at 16.6 ounces, the Pentax \*ist DL camera body is the lightest and smallest model in its class), they are still larger and heavier than other digital cameras, especially when you add the weight and bulk of a lens. It's especially important to try a D-SLR on for size before you buy one. In addition to a comfortable handhold, you need to make sure you can easily reach all the controls.

With non-D-SLR cameras, you'll likely complain that a camera is too small. But size is one of the benefits of the more compact models. You can slip one into a pocket or purse or wear it around your neck as a pendant and barely know it's there. And if you're going to a party, you won't have to lug around a D-SLR or leave it unattended while you have some fun on the dance floor.

Because of its size, a D-SLR is more obvious than some of its smaller and simpler counterparts, so it may be more difficult to sneak spontaneous shots. On the



other hand, when you're using a D-SLR, people give you wider berth, which is helpful in a crowded tourist area where everyone is snapping pictures; perhaps it's because they think you're a pro and they don't want to get in your way. Whatever the reason, it makes life a little easier.

The bottom line comes down to a few questions: Are you willing to trade price, size, and weight for more control over your picture making? And, are you willing to learn how to use the camera's features?

If you answer no to either of those questions, then you're better off with a smaller, more affordable non-D-SLR.

Frankly, though, we think the ideal is to have one of each: a D-SLR for special shooting opportunities and a smaller, less obtrusive anywhere/anytime camera. So, if you're stepping up to a D-SLR, hang onto your other digital camera; you'll have the best of both worlds. 

BY THEANO NIKITAS



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# Know How

## One Problem, Three Solutions

BY BRIAN HODGE

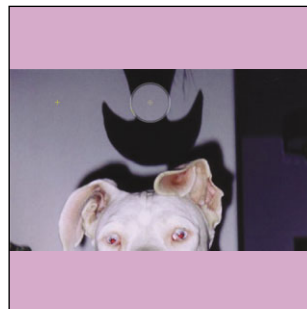
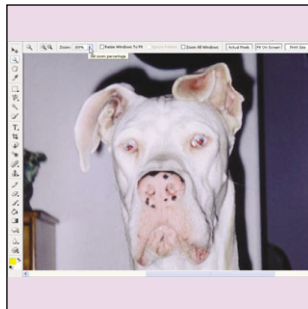
W

ith all the debates over the ramifications of cloning, there's one type you can engage in without violating any ethical standards. In our three photo editors, cloning refers to selecting donor pixels from one area of a picture and transplanting them into another area.

There are two main uses for this: covering up something you wish wasn't in the photo, and copying something you want to see more of. In our sample picture—the world's scariest snapshot of a Great Dane—we'll do both.

### Adobe Photoshop Elements 3.0

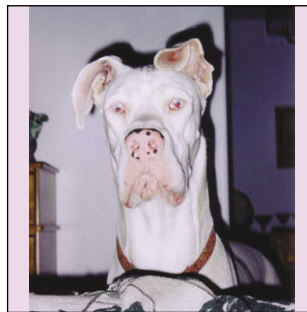
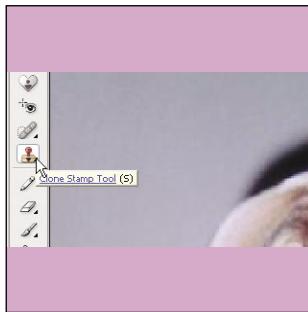
Open your photo in Standard Edit view. You may need to use the Zoom Tool to enlarge the photo in the workspace. When cloning, you'll want to blend in the transplanted pixels so they look natural, and you can see what you're doing better at a higher magnification.



To select the donor area, press ALT while clicking it. Then paint over the area you want to replace. Note the Aligned Mode. By default, when you click, the donor area remains a fixed distance from your brush. When Aligned is unchecked, the donor point remains the original spot you selected.

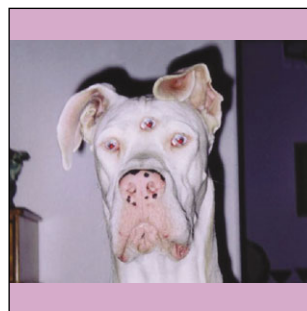
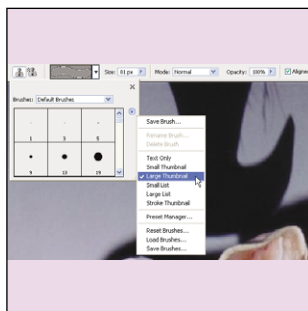
2

Select the Clone Stamp Tool from the Toolbar.



There is definitely an art to preventing the image from appearing obviously re-touched when adding new pixels. You may need to change the brush settings several times to blend textures and shading so that you create a smooth extension of the backdrop.

In the Tool Options bar, set brush options. The drop-down menu lets you choose a brush type, Size, Mode, and Opacity. To clone the wall to erase the shadow over the dog's head, we need a large brush in Normal Mode with 100% Opacity. (Lower opacity lets the underlying image show through.)

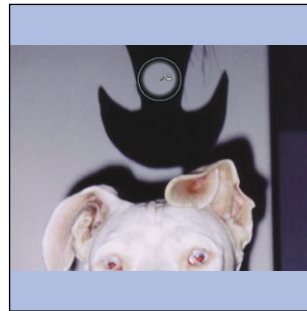
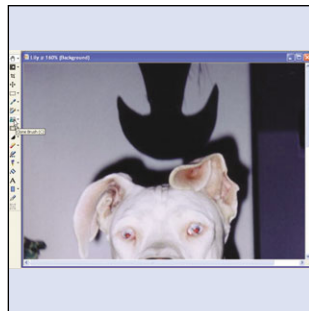


You can also clone an image to create a copy. As if this hound doesn't look eerie enough, we used a smaller brush size to plant a third eye in the middle of her forehead.

## Jasc Paint Shop Pro 9

1

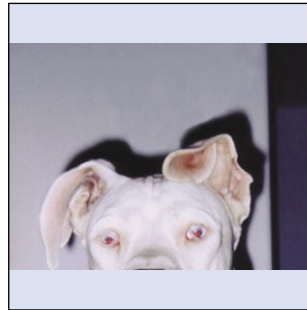
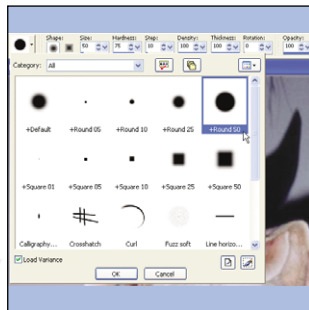
Open your photo, zoom in as needed, and select the Clone Brush from the toolbar.



Select the donor area by right-clicking it. Then start painting over the area you would like to replace. Aligned Mode works the same here as it does in Photoshop Elements.

2

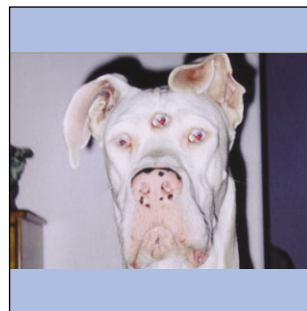
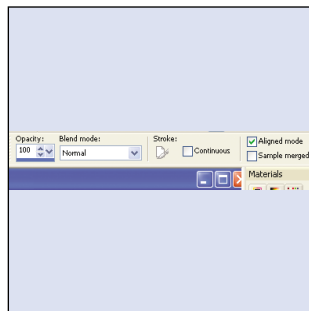
Configure brush settings in the Tool Options Palette. As with PSE, we'll stick with 100% Opacity and Normal Blend mode. We also have extra settings. Hardness determines the amount of fading at a brush's edges. Density determines coverage. Thickness changes brush width.



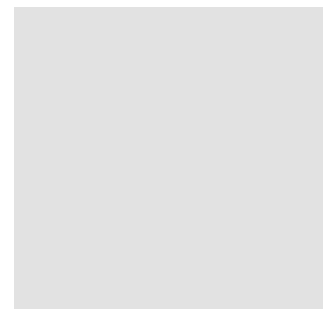
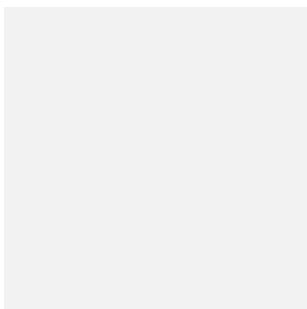
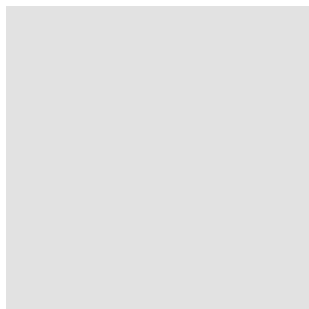
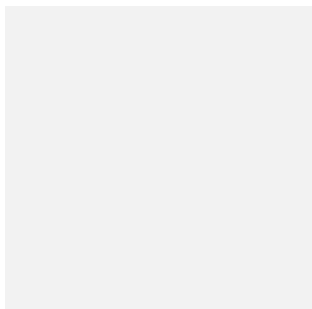
Change brush settings to create realistic blending and to work around smaller areas you want to leave intact. For example, where the shadow of the dog's ear merges with the shadow we want to get rid of, we used a smaller brush with more edge fading to contour the ear's fuzzy shadow.

3

The Stroke mode will also influence your results when Opacity is less than 100%. By default, painting over an area repeatedly will build up tone and intensity. With the Continuous option checked, going over an area more than once has no effect.



Again, just because we can.

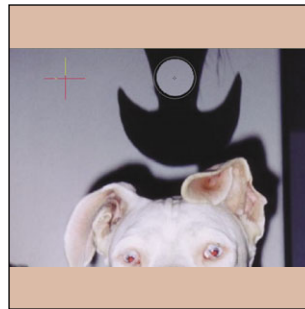
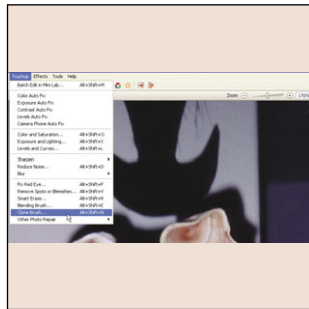




## Microsoft Digital Image Pro 10

1

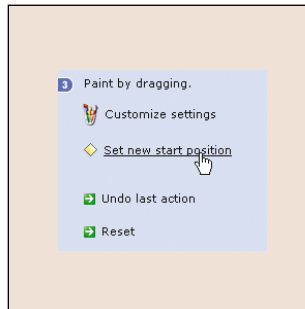
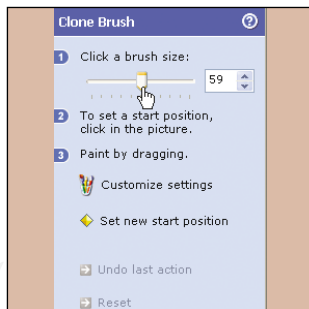
Open your photo, zoom in as necessary, and select the Clone Brush from the Touchup menu.



Set your donor area by clicking it. The crosshairs will sprout a circle—that's your brush. Click and drag to paint over the area you want to replace. There are no alignment options here, so once you begin painting, the crosshairs will always remain the same distance from your brush.

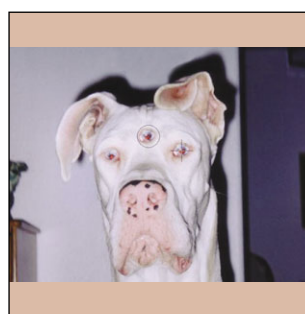
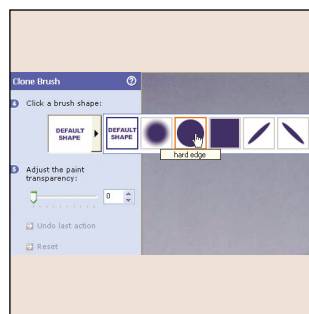
2

Set your Brush Size with the slider at the top of the Instruction Panel.



Whenever you need to adjust the donor area, click Set New Start Position. This clears the old crosshairs so you can click somewhere else.

It may appear that Brush Size is your only variable. But if you click Customize Settings, you can access Brush Shape and Paint Transparency, which uses a scale opposite of our other editors with zero denoting totally opaque. When you're done, click the Return Arrow at the bottom of the panel.



Don't forget to have fun.

5

6



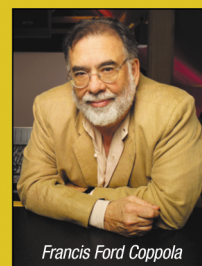
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## tips

### Take Pictures In The Snow

# 1

#### Use White Balance To Correct Coloring

When taking pictures in a setting full of snow, digital cameras tend to cast a bluish tint over the scene. To adjust for this tint, use your camera's automatic White Balance feature, which attempts to balance the colors based on what it perceives to be pure white. If you would rather manually adjust for white balance and your camera offers a manual white balance feature, check the manual for your model's specific steps and don't forget to set the White Balance back to Automatic (or whatever the default setting is) when you are done taking pictures of the snow.

# 2

#### Adjust To Light Reflection

When light reflects off of snow, digital cameras sometimes think there is more light in the scene than there actually is. When this happens, the camera underexposes some of the darker objects in the scene. You can compensate for this by manually overexposing the shot by one f-stop (+1), which is a fairly simple process and should work fine for most winter situations. Many smaller cameras won't let you control the exposure manually and will instead provide you with a Snow shooting mode, which will slightly overexpose the shot so that the darker objects get enough light to be seen more clearly next to the bright snow.

# 3

#### Weatherproof Your Camera

Carry spare batteries with you if you are taking shots in the frigid outdoors because your camera's batteries will not work as long in the cold as they do in the cozy indoors. When you are outside but you aren't using your camera, keep it in your pocket or, at the very least, its carrying case; the warmer it and its batteries are, the better. Have the camera handy so you can capture priceless candid shots, but put it back in your pocket or its case when you know you'll be rough-housing with your kids or pets. Be careful to not drop the camera in the snow, as moisture can get on the lenses or inside the camera and damage its parts. When you take the camera inside and condensation forms on the lens, let it evaporate on its own. If you wipe the lens, you risk scratching it.

# 4

#### Get Creative

Whether you are snapping shots of frost on your front door's window or powdery snowflakes falling during the year's first snowfall, have some fun while taking pictures. Take photographs at different times of the day to get interesting lighting effects and edit some of your shots into black-and-white prints using your computer's photo editor. Then hang them on your wall as a photo collage or in a collection of black picture frames. Use creative angles when taking the shots, so you can include different views of icicles or ice-covered scenery hung together to create a more dramatic effect.

# 5

#### Catch Action Shots

A picture of your son wiping snow off his face after being hit with a snowball or your daughter laughing with her friends as they stick a carrot in their snowman are much more interesting than children lined up in a row while smiling at the camera. Capture candid moments of your kids building snow forts or tumbling down the hill after falling off their sleds. These pictures show your child's true emotions at that moment in his fast-moving life. Use your camera to help you (and them) remember these experiences long after the snow has melted.



BY JENNIFER SUGGITT

# Gift Of The Month

## iPod shuffle

Is it possible to find one gift so perfect that you can give it to nearly anyone on your list and be guaranteed a smile? We know that's a tough one to live up to, but we think

we might just have the near-perfect gift: the iPod shuffle ([www.apple.com](http://www.apple.com)). Although we are aware that the shuffle falls outside of our monthly \$50 budget, this is the holiday season and the time to give. So, we thought we'd splurge a little.

### Mix It Up

While we realize it is highly unlikely that you don't already know what an iPod is, let us take a minute to tell you (just in case). iPod

is Apple's now iconic digital music player. If you look closely, you can spot its tell-tale white earbuds just about everywhere you go. Some would argue that the iPod is perhaps the greatest thing to hit the market since, well, since sliced bread. Who are we to argue?

The shuffle is Apple's most compact and most affordable version of the iPod, which are just two of the many reasons we think it makes the perfect gift. The



shuffle weighs less than an ounce and measures 3.3 x 0.98 x 0.33 inches (HxWxD), making it portable enough for anyone to take anywhere. And at \$99 for a 512MB version that holds 120 songs or \$129 for a 1GB version that holds 240 songs, the shuffle won't break the bank.

Another reason we love the shuffle is its simplicity. The shuffle is a dream to use, even for those on your list who are not exactly tech-savvy. Probably the most

time-consuming part of using the shuffle is setting up your playlist on iTunes (the program you use to manage your digital music collection), and that's not really all that hard.

### More Than Music

So, you like the idea of giving a shuffle, but the gift idea you're really struggling with is for someone who doesn't listen to a lot of music? No problem. The iTunes Music Store ([www.itunes.com](http://www.itunes.com)) has audiobooks and podcasts available, too. There are more than 11,000 audiobook titles available for download, so there's something for everyone. iTunes and shuffle will even keep track of where you left off listening, so you won't lose your place. And for the students in your life, the shuffle can also serve as a thumbdrive to transfer

files between computers if they leave enough available memory to do so.

As we stop to consider all of the people on our holiday gift list who would love to get the shuffle from us, we can really only hope for one thing: that one of them reads this article in time to realize it would be the perfect gift for us, too. 

BY JOY MARTIN





# Kids & Technology

## Part Three: Computers & The Internet

It's common knowledge that computers are not indispensable for young children. Even though your 4-year-old may use a PC at preschool, it is not essential for her education at that age.

That doesn't mean, however, that young kids can't learn by using a PC. At some point in their education, the PC will be necessary, so it doesn't hurt to let your young kids get comfortable with it. In the process, they can strengthen their phonics, math, critical-thinking, and problem-solving skills by using quality software.

That leaves you to answer a few key questions: Should my kids have their own PC? If so, how much should I expect to pay for it? And what's the best way to monitor what they do with it, especially when they go online?

Ultimately you'll have to decide what works best for the individual needs of your kids, but we offer you ideas to help with the decision-making process.

### Starter PCs

Prudent parents may choose to keep their toddlers away from the family PC, reasoning that little benefit can be gained by such a young child. However, kids at

this age can become familiar with the idea of computing through products geared especially toward them.

VTech's Tote & Go Laptop (\$19.99; [www.vtechkids.com](http://www.vtechkids.com)), for instance, comes with a wireless mouse and is for children ages 3 and up. It's loaded with 30 activities and games to help youngsters learn the alphabet and basic math and spelling.

For older kids, ages 5 and up, VTech offers the Nitro Notebook (\$49.99). It features an attachable mouse, QWERTY keyboard, and LCD. Kids can choose from among 80 preinstalled games to learn lessons in music, math, reading, and Spanish. Or, Nitro can "read" stories to them.

## Keep Your Kids Safe Online

**Y**ou want to trust your kids when they go online, but you can't always trust others who are online, too. Dangers lurking on the Internet—predators and pornography—are real. So you turn to other technology for help, and you're not alone.

According to a 2005 Pew Internet & American Life Project survey, 54% of families with teens and an Internet connection in the home use some type of filter or monitoring software to help keep their kids safe online. That's an increase of 65% from just five years ago.

A number of products are available that can help you regulate your teen's use of the Internet. A good filtering or monitoring product, along with a firm set of rules, can keep the Internet's garbage out of your home.

**Out in the open.** The first step is to place the PC your teens use in a "public" area of the home. The same Pew Internet poll states that 73% of teens who go online at home report that the PC they use is out in the open. Knowing that you have a watchful, concerned eye on what they are viewing will help steer kids away from trouble.

**Monitoring software.** It may seem like something Big Brother would do, but installing monitoring software on your teen's PC is a good way to keep track of online activities without hovering over her shoulder. Two good choices are CYBERSitter 9.0 (\$39.95; [www.cybersitter.com](http://www.cybersitter.com)) and CyberPatrol 7.5 (\$39.95; [www.cyberpatrol.com](http://www.cyberpatrol.com)).

**Time controls.** Even if you didn't worry about your kids wandering into inappropriate Web sites, you may still have concerns about how much time they spend online or how long they play games. A good timing program or device can keep track of their time for you.

ENUFF PC (\$34.95; [www.enuffpc.com](http://www.enuffpc.com)) is software that sets daily and weekly time limits and differentiates between time spent online and that logged in chat rooms. You also can configure it to block certain programs, games, and chat rooms.

EyeTimer (\$29.95; [www.eyetimer.com](http://www.eyetimer.com)) can monitor multiple CE products in your home. The basic package is software to regulate use of your PC. But if you purchase one of three available value packs (\$119.95 and up), you get a transmitter and up to three switches so that EyeTimer's control features can work on other electronic devices in your home, such as your TV or video game console.

The Time-Scout Monitor (\$89.95; [www.time-scout.com](http://www.time-scout.com)) acts as a time bank. Plug it into the wall and then plug a CE device into the Time-Scout Monitor. You "deposit" time onto a swipe card for each child and then he swipes the card through the monitor when he begins and ends his PC time.

Of course, the best gadgets are the second line of defense in protecting your children from online filth. You're the first—and last. Explain to your children what is appropriate and encourage them to talk with you about their online experiences.

Once you step up to a real PC for your kids, you have several options. One inexpensive option is to pass down to them a PC you've outgrown. If you are still happy with your PC, you could buy a second-hand PC for your child and then equip it with peripherals from KidzMouse ([www.kidzmouse.com](http://www.kidzmouse.com)) to appeal to them. For instance, the brightly colored SpongeBob SquarePants and Disney keyboards (\$29.95) have only 67 keys, not 104 like a standard keyboard. Keys that kids don't usually use, such as function keys, are removed, and the keys are rounded to better fit children's fingers.

KidzMouse also sells a variety of character mice, featuring Mickey and Winnie the Pooh (\$19.95), SpongeBob, Blue's Clues, Dora the Explorer, Elmo, and Cookie Monster (\$24.95). These mice are smaller than a standard scroll mouse and respond to the squeeze of a child's hand, not a finger tap. You also can buy a standard scroll mouse in a BenjiBee or SpongeBob motif (\$29.95).





Another alternative is to buy your younger kids an entirely new PC designed to fit their interests. At KidComputers.com ([www.kid-computers.com](http://www.kid-computers.com)), you can assemble your own desktop system, starting with PC towers in several kid-friendly designs, such as SpiderMan, Race Car, Kitty, and Doggie. Then choose a keyboard, mouse or trackball, monitor, and maybe even a headset or monitor cover.

Or you can start with the Explorer PC package (\$499 without monitor) and customize it. As is, it contains an Intel Celeron D processor, 256MB of memory, a 40GB hard drive, CD-ROM/DVD-ROM drive, two 2.0 USB ports, and Windows XP Home Edition.

### Computers To Grow With

A third option, especially for parents of tweens and teens, is to purchase a PC without the overt kiddie appeal but

CLIP AND USE THESE GUIDELINES TO HELP YOUR KIDS "EARN" THE RIGHT TO USE THE COMPUTER.

## The Rules

- 1 Have I spent time today exercising my body and mind in healthy pursuits?
- 2 Have I finished my homework so that I can play a computer game?
- 3 Will using the computer for fun exceed my allotment of "screen time" for the day?
- 4 Do I understand and promise to abide by my parents' online safety rules?
- 5 Will I immediately report to my parents any online encounter that is questionable or makes me uncomfortable?

## Screen Computer Games

Perhaps you heard of the mess with Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, the popular video game from Take Two Interactive Software. Best Buy, Target, and other retailers removed the game from their stores earlier this year after it was discovered that GTA contained X-rated material that could be viewed with the help of an Internet download.

As with all other technologies, parents must shoulder the responsibility of monitoring which games their kids play and how long they play them. You can't play and review each game, but you can take the time to see if it measures up to your standards.

That's where the ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board) can help. The ESRB was founded in 1994 to assign and enforce ratings on computer and video games. Ratings are assigned based on the publishers' description of the content and the opinions of ESRB raters who view game footage submitted by the publishers.

There are two important components of an ESRB rating: the rating symbol and the content descriptors. Located on the front of a game package, the rating symbol indicates the audience for whom the title is appropriate.

Ratings include EC (Early Childhood), E (Everyone), E10+ (Everyone 10 and older), T (Teen), M (Mature; 17 and older), and AO (Adults Only). You also can find a game's rating at the ESRB site ([www.esrb.com](http://www.esrb.com)). A rating of RP means the game's rating is still pending.

On the back of the box (and on the ESRB Web site), you'll find the content descriptors, which reveal the type of material a player will encounter in the game. Examples include comic mischief; crude humor; sexual themes; strong language; and use of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.



## Too Much Of A Good Thing?

**T**oo much of a good thing—sun rays, chocolate, an increase in your credit limit—can be detrimental. Lump the kids' TV and computer time each day in with that group.

The AAP (American Academy of Pediatrics; [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)) gives guidelines on its Web site about setting time limits for children's "screen time" with the TV or computer. On the site the AAP suggests that you limit your children's time in front of a screen, including playing computer games and surfing the Internet. The AAP "recommends no more than 1 to 2 hours of quality TV and videos a day for older children and no screen time for children under the age of 2."

With that in mind, here are some suggested time limits for kids of all ages.

### TODDLERS AGES 2 AND UP

Children in this age group offer their own limitations because their short attention spans prevent them from sitting in front of a PC for hours. Time spent in front of a computer—maybe 10 to 15 minutes—should be spent with you. Otherwise, they won't make any sense out of what they're doing.



### GRADE SCHOOLERS

Depending upon their homework assignments, grade schoolers may need to use programs and even Internet research to complete their work. Whether it's for doing homework, playing games, or chatting with friends (if that's allowed in your household), grade schoolers shouldn't spend more than an hour a day on the computer if possible.

### PRESCHOOL

With your assistance, preschoolers can learn how to play educational computer games. Limit them to around 30 minutes a day.

### TEENS

Monitoring screen time for teens is the hardest because they have the most reasons to use a computer: doing homework, playing games, researching their interests, downloading music, chatting with friends, etc. For them, consider breaking down the overall time limit—no more than two hours—into categories. For instance, limit chat time or gaming time to 30 minutes a day and always make sure their homework is done before they spend screen time on leisure activities.

with serious computing power. To go this route, visit the Web sites of reputable PC makers such as eMachines ([www.e4me.com](http://www.e4me.com)), Dell ([www.dell.com](http://www.dell.com)), HP ([www.hp.com](http://www.hp.com)), and Gateway ([www.gateway.com](http://www.gateway.com)). At each of these sites, you can piece together a computer that meets your budget and your kids' desire to have a PC that will grow with them and perhaps go with them to college.

eMachine towers start at \$389.99 for an 80GB hard drive with an Intel Celeron D processor. Monitor choices include the slim 15-inch E15T3 LCD (\$199.99) and the slimmer 15-inch E15T4 LCD (\$269.99).

Another good starter PC for kids is Gateway's DX100S (\$499.99), which has an Intel Celeron D 336 processor, 256MB of memory, a 40GB hard drive, four 2.0 USB ports, and a 17-inch monitor.

Dell's Dimension 3000 desktop systems and its Inspiron 6000 notebooks offer a range of features and pricing options. For instance, you can buy an Inspiron 6000 15.4-inch notebook with Intel Celeron M 360 processor for \$793 (price listed on Dell.com at press time).

Or, go with an all-in-one solution, such as HP's Media Center Photosmart PC. The minimum configuration of the new m7100e series (\$879), without monitor,

includes an AMD Athlon 64 processor, 512MB memory, an 80GB hard drive, two 2.0 USB ports, and a PCI TV tuner card so your kids can do their homework and later watch TV on the same machine.

### Keep Your Priorities

While you figure out the best PC options for your kids, remember to keep your priorities straight. As much as they might want to use a computer and the Internet for playing games and keeping up with their friends, remind them—and yourself—that it is for their education first and their entertainment second. 

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH



# December Calendar

## Keep Your Holidays Happy

Tear out this handy December calendar and stick it on your refrigerator, or fold it up and put it in your purse. We give you all the important dates and tips to remember to make your holiday shopping an organized, fun, and enjoyable experience. Refer to it often, and above all, don't forget to relax and enjoy the season. Happy holidays!

| SUNDAY                                                                                    | MONDAY                                                                                                                               | TUESDAY                                                                                   | WEDNESDAY                                                                                 | THURSDAY                                                                                                             | FRIDAY                                                                                      | SATURDAY                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                           |                                                                                           | 1<br>Create a holiday gift list that you keep with you at all times. Whenever you think of a gift idea, jot it down. | 2<br>    | 3                                                                        |
| 4<br>  | 5<br>Start thinking of stocking stuffers. Sometimes the little gifts are the hardest.                                                | 6<br>  | 7                                                                                         | 8<br>                            | 9                                                                                           | 10<br>Decide on which charities you'll donate to and what you'll donate. |
| 11                                                                                        | 12<br>                                            | 13                                                                                        | 14<br> | 15<br>You should have the majority of your holiday shopping done by now.                                             | 16<br> | 17                                                                       |
| 18<br> | 19<br>Host a gift-wrapping party for your girlfriends and sisters. Make an otherwise tedious chore into a new tradition!             | 20<br> | 21                                                                                        | 22<br>                           | 23<br>Check it twice: Double-check that you've got a gift for everyone on your list.        | 24<br>Christmas Eve                                                      |
| 25<br>Christmas Day;<br>First day of Hanukkah (begins at sundown)                         | 26<br>Second day of Hanukkah;<br>After-Christmas Sales: Don't stress yourself out by trying to catch the early-bird sales. Sleep in! | 27<br>Third day of Hanukkah                                                               | 28<br>Fourth day of Hanukkah                                                              | 29<br>Fifth day of Hanukkah                                                                                          | 30<br>Sixth day of Hanukkah;<br>Light your Shabbat candles!                                 | 31<br>Seventh day of Hanukkah;<br>New Year's Eve                         |
| 1<br>Eighth day of Hanukkah;<br>New Year's Day                                            |                                                  |                                                                                           |                                                                                           |                                                                                                                      |                                                                                             |                                                                          |



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# Manage Your Health

## Part Two: Don't Let It Manage You

W

e all know a lifestyle that is both healthy and stress-free is paramount to good health and long life. The fact is physical impairments are out of our control; they may be a result of a genetic predisposition, injury, or disease. Some of us, though, are lucky enough to maintain our good health with a sensible diet and moderate exercise. Either way, a health problem can throw a wrench into your daily routine.

In this second part in a series on CE & Your Health, we'll show you how (with the help of CE) to turn that wrench into a tool that can make living with some of the most common health conditions just a little bit easier.

BY ELIZABETH DIXON

### The Heart Of The Matter

All too often, women view heart disease as an ailment that predominantly affects men. According to the American Heart Association, since 1984 more women have died of cardiovascular disease than men. Women's symptoms are usually more subtle than men's. They can include queasiness, jaw or shoulder pain, low energy, and/or shortness of breath. It's important to pay attention when you start feeling ill and insist that your doctor take your complaint seriously. And as with most diseases, do what you can to try to prevent heart disease by maintaining good overall health.

The American Heart Association's Just Move ([www.justmove.org](http://www.justmove.org)) site is a good place to jump start your heart-healthy lifestyle. We found the most useful feature to be its Exercise Diary. Register on the site for access to charts that let you set exercise goals; log your activity; and keep stats according to time, number of workouts, and distance. A preferences page lets you choose from various workout activities and add additional items by which to track your progress, such as pace and weight. The log then monitors your primary activity on a weekly basis and compares your actual workout with your set goals.

The AHA heartily recommends walking to help prevent cardiovascular disease. In order to maximize your workout, it's important to walk at a steady pace; one way to do this is with an HRM (heart rate monitor). HRMs keep tabs on your exertion rate, ensuring its consistency. The Polar F4 (\$89.95; [www.polarusa.com](http://www.polarusa.com)) is an HRM watch with a slim design specifically for women. It's wireless and features OwnCal, which tracks how many calories you burn during exercise.



### Keep The Pressure Low

An additional way to keep your heart healthy is to closely monitor your blood pressure. If your goal is to lower your blood pressure or if you simply want to track it to document what's normal for you, monitor your blood pressure and keep accurate records.

Gone are the days of cumbersome upper-arm cuffs; Panasonic offers wrist-style blood pressure monitors that are both sleek and easy to use. The Ultra-Slim Wrist Blood Pressure Monitor (\$89.99; [www2.panasonic.com](http://www2.panasonic.com)) has an automatic memory feature that can store up to 90 readings (with date and time), and its Color Configuration System makes it easier to recognize if your results are in an unhealthy range.

Sometimes high blood pressure is something you can control, while other times medication and a doctor's observation may be necessary. Be sure to get the proper amount of exercise and eat foods that are low in sodium to keep your blood pressure in check.



### Be Diligent About Diabetes

More than 16 million Americans are afflicted with diabetes, and close to 9 million of those are women. If this disease isn't diligently managed, it can cause a host of problems, including loss of vision or limbs. It's imperative to regularly test your blood sugar, but it's also important to understand those results and their implications.

Manufacturer of pump therapy and glucose monitoring supplies, Medtronic ([www.medtronic.com](http://www.medtronic.com)), recently announced its Guardian RT Continuous Glucose Monitoring System. This FDA-approved system offers improved diabetes management by continuously monitoring glucose levels and alerting the user when levels become too high or low. The system is designed to help people with diabetes note the effect exercise, sleeping, eating, and other activities have on their glucose levels.

The system works in conjunction with finger sticks that calibrate the monitor and uses a subcutaneous disposable glucose sensor connected to a transmitter. The transmitter communicates with a monitor using radio frequency. Every five minutes, glucose measurements are sent from the transmitter to the monitor, which displays the glucose values on its screen. If the user's levels reach potentially harmful levels, an alarm (preset by the user) sounds a warning. Personal reports and charts can be viewed after data is downloaded to a computer using therapy management software and a docking station. The product is in limited market release at this time, so there's no price available, and it's only recommended for people with diabetes (type 1 or 2) who are 18 and older.



### You Say You Want A Revolution

Overweight and inactive children are more likely to develop diabetes, especially type 2, than those who stay on the move. The coolest product we've seen recently that helps keep your kids active and healthy is DDRMAX Dance, Dance Revolution from Konami (\$39.99; [www.konami.com](http://www.konami.com)). It's a video game pad for PlayStation2 plus so much more. Kids follow dance moves on the TV by stepping on four directional buttons keeping pace with on-screen cues. With a diverse soundtrack, this game is sure to keep kids moving for hours. And, it's rated E for everyone, signifying wholesome fun for the entire family. Talk about cool. Can we play? ●





# tips

## Use CE In The Kitchen

1

### Tune In To Holiday Classics

Although you're probably planning on spending several hours in the kitchen preparing for this year's holiday dinner, you don't have to miss out on traditional screenings of "It's a Wonderful Life." If you have a wall-mounted or cabinet-mounted LCD TV in your kitchen, tune in to the seasonal flicks that you so vividly remember watching as a child. Or, go portable and place your laptop on the tabletop; pop in the DVD of "A Christmas Story" to relive Ralphie receiving his Red Ryder BB gun.

2

### Tidy Your Kitchen & Your Schedule

Your kitchen is the heart of your home, so show it off during the holidays. Schedules tend to be busiest at Christmastime, and many times, appointments and phone numbers end up posted on your kitchen refrigerator. Eliminate that clutter by using your PDA to store your family's schedules. Don't forget to program important holiday events, such as the Christmas dinner you are hosting for your husband's boss. And, remember to schedule a reminder to bake Christmas treats for your kids' winter musical programs.

3

### Digitize Your Recipes

Keeping your recipes organized or trying to remember which cookbook contains your favorite casserole recipe can be a frustrating task. Instead, gather your favorite recipes and create an organized electronic recipe book on your laptop. Invest in recipe software that lets you import all your recipes into an organized format (try The Living Cookbook; \$29.95; [www.livingcookbook.com](http://www.livingcookbook.com)). Doing so will save you from turning the kitchen upside down in search of the recipe for your grandmother's famous Christmas ham. Also, if you have a home wireless network, take advantage of it this season by using your laptop to follow a step-by-step cooking demonstration as you prepare for your holiday dinner party.

4

### Enjoy Holiday Melodies

You're used to packing your digital music player to take along to the gym, but you can expand its capabilities for everyday use during the holiday season. If your teenage son or husband is tired of hearing holiday music, you can store your Manheim Steamroller collection on your digital music player for your listening pleasure. Put in your earbuds, light the cinnamon spice candles, and pour yourself a glass of sparkling champagne as you enjoy the holiday melodies while you tidy up the kitchen after dinner.

5

### Set Your Cell

The next time your children bundle up to play in the snow, don't let baking that batch of holiday cookies stop you from joining in the fun. Take advantage of the opportunity to build a snowman with your kids by setting the alarm on your cell phone to sound when your cookies are done baking. It takes only seconds to set your phone's alarm, and it beats the idea of running in every two minutes to check the oven, or worse yet, burning your batch.



BY LINNÉ OURADA

## First Glimpse Special Product Section

This special product section is produced in partnership with leading consumer electronics manufacturers and allows us to provide readers with the most timely product information possible. Browse through these First Glimpse pages to learn about the latest hot products.

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# first glimpse

Special Product Section



Toshiba LCDVDs  
[www.tacp.toshiba.com](http://www.tacp.toshiba.com)

## Toshiba LCDVDs

Looking for the perfect gift this holiday season? Toshiba provides the latest in home entertainment with a wide variety of TV options. With a new Toshiba LCDVD, thrill your friends with the convenience of a built-in DVD player and the beauty of a flat-panel LCD TV display.

The LCDVD line combines two Toshiba strengths—Toshiba TV picture quality and Toshiba DVD performance. By utilizing side slot-loading DVD players, Toshiba gives you another key feature without compromising the cosmetic appearance in the home. Whether your loved one wants a 14-inch or 20-inch TV for the kitchen, or a 37-inch TV for the family room wall, an LCDVD (with built-in DVD) eliminates any concern about where to place the DVD player. Because there are no extra

components, no extra DVD wires, and no extra remotes, LCDVD is the ultimate in space-saving convenience. If you want to give the gift that allows for a smooth transition into digital television, think about one of the integrated LCDVD sets that incorporate an ATSC/QAM digital tuner with a CableCARD™ Slot, TV Guide On Screen® interactive program guide, Channel Browser, and HDMI. Toshiba's full line of LCDVD models range in size from 14 inches to 37 inches—you're sure to find the right size for everyone on your list!

# TOSHIBA

# first glimpse

Special Product Section

Toshiba DLP TVs  
[www.tacp.toshiba.com](http://www.tacp.toshiba.com)



## Toshiba DLP TVs

To complete the perfect home theater, give your loved one the gift of a Toshiba DLP Projection TV. Toshiba offers a line of DLP PTVs with screen sizes ranging from 46 inches to 72 inches. All DLP™ sets in the Toshiba 2005 line offer integrated HDTV tuners and are loaded with features for a smooth transition into HDTV.

Toshiba offers both 1080p and 720p resolution to provide beautiful high-definition images. Toshiba 720p sets utilize a new TALEN Light Engine and Toshiba 1080p sets use the new TALEN X light engine with Xtreme BLAC™, incorporating advanced design and technology to enhance the home theater experience. Through the use of Xtreme BLAC (Black Level Aperture Control), the new 1080p sets offer stunning resolution and enhanced contrast ratios ensuring crystal clear picture quality. All 1080p DLP™ sets from Toshiba offer a new

cosmetic design featuring space-saving bottom speakers. Other innovative features include the Channel Browser™, which lets you use a back button for easy access to recently viewed channels and the Radiance™ 150 Hi-Bright Lamp for noticeably brighter images. And all new Cinema Series DLP™ TV models include THINC™ (Toshiba Home Interactive Network Connection) home entertainment networking, which allows you to connect your TV to your PC and play back MP3 audio files and JPEG pictures using only the TV remote. What more could you ask for this holiday?

# TOSHIBA



# first glimpse

Special Product Section



EZnP EZDigiMagic  
www.eznpn-usa.com  
(800) 828-6475

## EZnP Offers A Family Of Digital Storage Solutions

The EZDigiMagic line of storage products gives you convenient information storage, anytime and anyplace. The complete array of products includes CD, DVD, and HDD-based storage solutions. All EZDigiMagic products are portable and designed to go where you go.

### The EZDigiMagic products are:

**Complete:** Stand-alone solutions that operate without a computer.

**Compatible:** Works well with all major memory card formats and computer operating systems.

**Easy-to-use:** Portable and lightweight designs that utilize simple, one-touch operation.

**Innovative:** Employs the latest in technology and product features to provide simple solutions to complex storage needs.

### DM220-C24 CD Burner (MSRP: \$259)

- One-touch backup from flash memory card to CD-R/RW
- Supports most digital camera memory card formats currently available on the market

- *Ultra Verify* feature that allows users to verify the entire disc or a single-burn session against the flash memory card
- Multifunction LCD provides information on operational modes, disc content, and memory card content
- Disc Spanning technology for high-capacity flash card backup
- Supports most current digital camera memory card formats
- Simple, single button operation—no PC needed
- Hi-Speed USB 2.0 interface for PC connection
- Can be used as an external DVD combo drive or card reader
- Lightweight and portable, convenient, slim design includes battery compartment
- Includes durable carrying case with shoulder strap

### DM220-D08 DVD Burner (MSRP: \$399)

- One-touch backup from flash memory card to DVD or CD
- High-capacity flash card backup—store up to 4GB of images on DVD, and it works with all DVD/CD recordable media
- *Ultra Verify* feature that allows users to verify the entire disc or a single-burn session against the flash memory card
- Multifunction LCD provides information on operational modes, disc content, and memory card content

# first glimpse

Special Product Section



- Disc Spanning technology for high-capacity flash card backup
- Supports most current digital camera memory card formats
- Simple, single button operation—no PC needed
- Hi-Speed USB 2.0 host connection
- Versatile design, can be used as an external DVD read/write drive or flash memory card reader
- Lightweight and portable, convenient, slim design includes battery compartment
- Includes durable carrying case with shoulder strap

**EZDigiMagic DM180 (MSRP:  
20GB: \$349; 40GB \$499)**

- One-touch copy from flash memory card to 1.8-inch 20GB or 40GB hard disk, no PC needed
- Compact, stylish, palm-sized design uses built-in rechargeable Li-Ion battery
- High-speed data transfer rate (USB 2.0)
- Supports most current digital camera flash memory cards
- Large LCD for user-friendly interface and data access
- Fully compatible with USB 2.0 specifications

- Versatile design—can be used as an external hard drive or flash memory card reader
- Includes durable carrying case and lanyard





# first glimpse

Special Product Section

**Yamaha YPT-300**  
[www.yamaha.com](http://www.yamaha.com)  
MSRP: \$149.99  
(714) 522-9011



## Yamaha Quality At An Affordable Price

Yamaha's YPT-300 portable keyboard is an entry-level model that offers a number of new features at an attractive price point. The YPT-300 features 61 piano-sized keys, 32 notes of polyphony, and an ultra-realistic Yamaha Stereo Grand Piano voice. It also includes the built-in, upgraded Y.E.S. 5 (Yamaha Education Suite version 5) with exercises, interactive Listen And Learn lessons, and a chord dictionary.

Designed both for beginners sitting down to play for the first time and advanced players who have been playing for years, this new portable is the first model in its price range to include complete General MIDI compatibility, five-song memory and touch-sensitive keys—functions that up until recently could only be found on higher-priced or professional keyboards.

The YPT-300 offers 32-note maximum polyphony, which allows the keyboard to play a maximum of up to 32 notes at once, regardless of what functions are used.

In addition, Y.E.S. 5 allows you to select any song and use it for a left-handed, right-handed, or two-handed educational lesson. Y.E.S. 5 puts you in the driver's seat, allowing you to practice at your own pace by choosing the song for the lesson, practice the parts that need work, and select the practice method. Lesson 1, Listen And Learn, helps the player to learn the melody or rhythm of a selected song. Lesson 2, Timing, helps the player concentrate on playing each note in time with the rhythmic accompaniment. The correct notes sound even if you play wrong notes as long as you play in time with the rhythm. Lesson 3, Waiting, helps you play the notes that should be played, which appear in the score and the keyboard on the display. The song pauses until you play the right note. The YPT-300 can connect to the Internet for online lessons, and allows users to learn songs transferred from the computer to its flash ROM.

The YPT-300 provides you with the versatile General MIDI song format, which simplifies recording by being able to

# first glimpse

Special Product Section



connect and share sound information with other instruments, computers, and equipment.

Using the same classical design cues augmented by an easy-to-read backlit LCD display, the YPT-300 ups the ante to an incredible 482 instrument voices (Guitar, Bass, Pianos, Strings, Ensemble, Reed, Drums, Organs, Trumpets, Sax, Choir, Synth, Sound Effects, and more), including Yamaha's XGlite voice set, along with 106 accompaniment styles (Latin, Country, Jazz, Pianist, R&B, Ballroom, Dance, Disco, among others) and 102 preset songs.

Its built-in five-track sequencer is a breakthrough that allows you to record your own original music. Full and Split keyboard functions allow you to choose between 61 keys of one instrument or one instrument voice for each hand, and 32 notes of polyphony produce incredibly rich sound.

The YPT-300's Portable Grand feature is perfect for beginners and students. No matter what buttons and features

you've been playing with (for example, Drums or DJ), one touch of the Portable Grand button instantly resets the keyboard to the finest on-board, stereo-sampled piano from top to bottom.





# first glimpse

Special Product Section

**Samsung SC-D6550 Compact DuoCam**  
[www.samsung.com](http://www.samsung.com)  
MSRP: \$599.99



## Multiple Functions, Same Quality Results

The new Compact DuoCam gives you the ability to easily record those favorite moments while also recording still images or MPEG-4 movie clips. The easy connections to your PC via USB give you all the tools you need to edit and distribute those special memories.

The palm-sized SC-D6550 features Samsung's groundbreaking dual-lens system, which can switch modes effortlessly to produce sharp digital video or high-resolution still images.

Samsung's DuoCam successfully merges both still and video functions to offer you a complete digital imaging package. The latest DuoCam SC-D6550 upholds a tradition of video excellence with a CCD lens and 10X optical zoom that delivers high-resolution video images with vibrant color resolution and detail. For still photography, the 5MP CCD still lens delivers 2,592 x 1,944 pixel image resolution with 3X optical zoom, enabling you to create large prints with maximum picture

# first glimpse

Special Product Section



sharpness and color accuracy. The DuoCam also offers an MPEG-4 recording format to allow you to create smaller video files that can easily be shared via the Internet.

The DuoCam also offers top-notch digital device compatibility. The built-in Multi-Card Slot allows you to store and transfer their files using Memory Stick, Memory Stick Pro, Secure Digital cards or MultiMediaCards. The high-performance PC interface surpasses traditional camcorders with

USB 2.0 compatibility that provides quick, smooth data transfers to PC hard drives. And Samsung's PictBridge printing protocol allows you to connect the camera directly to a compatible printer via a standard USB cable.





# first glimpse

Special Product Section



## Hitachi DZGX20A DVD Camcorder

[www.hitachi.com](http://www.hitachi.com)

MSRP: \$899.99

## Discover The Innovation

The flagship of proprietary Hitachi DVD camcorder technology, this model delivers high-quality 2.12MP resolution in a sleek, lightweight, and compact design. Record true 16:9 widescreen video straight to DVD-R for instant playback on standard DVD players or to DVD-RAM for easy editing and computer transfer. Transfer still images to a personal computer or printer using removable memory cards. Intuitive navigation allows for immediate access to on-screen thumbnails

for editing and playback without fast forwarding or rewinding. Experience the ultimate in home movie creation with the most innovative DVD camcorder ever designed.

### Product Highlights

- Built-In Flash: In-camera flash for superior digital stills in dark environments

# first glimpse

Special Product Section



- Connectivity: Built-in Hi-Speed USB 2.0 for easy connection to personal computers
- Powered Accessory Port: Connect optional accessories to the hotshoe connection; perfect for additional lights
- Quick Menu: The Quick Mode Menu condenses the On-Screen Menu to just the commonly used features
- Disc Loading: Mini 3-inch DVD loads directly into the camcorder for instant recording
- Slim Design, Lightweight Portability: Innovative, slim, yet durable design, weighing less than 2 pounds, perfect for traveling

**HITACHI**  
Inspire the Next



# music & movies

music

BY ELIZABETH DIXON

## This Bird Has Flown: A 40th Anniversary Tribute To The Beatles' 'Rubber Soul'

• AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$18.98

VARIOUS ARTISTS  
[Razor & Tie]



We'll be honest: At first we were a little miffed at the idea of a remake of "Rubber Soul." That's completely unnecessary, we thought; no group of artists, no matter how determined, can possibly remake its genius, so why even try. Then, we sat back for a second, took a deep breath, and requested a copy.

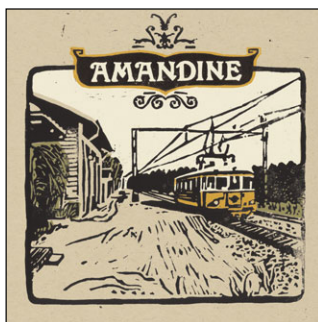
The album starts out right, with The Donnas' rendition of "Drive My Car"; not much could be done to ruin this song's peppiness. "Norwegian Wood" is far more disappointing, though, with The Fiery Furnaces butchering the idyllic classic. Yonder Mountain String Band appears on the fifth track, "Think For Yourself," with pleasing banjo and string arrangements. Ben Harper adds kinky reggae flair to "Michelle," while Ben Lee slows down "In My Life" to a torturous point.

Overall, we'd have to give this album a C. It's a nice idea and a fitting tribute, but some things are better left alone; "Rubber Soul" didn't need redone.

## This Is Where Our Hearts Collide

• AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$15.98

AMANDINE  
[FatCat Records]

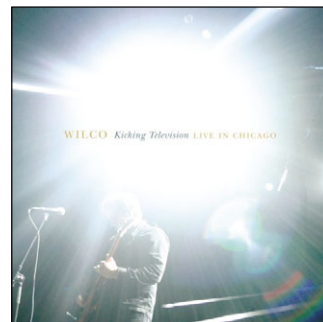


Swedish-borne Amandine makes a sparkling debut on British label, FatCat Records. The uplifting, yet serious record takes the listener on a calm atmospheric journey complete with piano, banjo, and accordion. Some of the lyrics may borderline cliché but still ring clearly from the heart.

## Kicking Television—Live In Chicago

• AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$24.98

WILCO  
[None Such Records]



We love live albums, and we love bands that are brave enough to play the same venue four nights in a row—there aren't many. Wilco shares its extensive repertoire on this double-disc compilation chronicling a May 2005 run at Chicago's Vic Theatre. Watch for the forthcoming DVD.

## Lagniappe

• AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$11

SADDLE CREEK ARTIST COMPILATION  
[Saddle Creek Records]



Saddle Creek is doing its part to help hurricane victims by releasing "Lagniappe," a compilation with 100% of the proceeds going to the Red Cross. (The seemingly obscure title does, indeed, have a meaning: "something given by way of good measure." Those guys are clever, huh?) Expect to hear Bright Eyes and The Faint, among others.

## Descended Like Vultures

• AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$13.98

ROGUE WAVE  
[Sub Pop]



Rogue Wave's "Descended Like Vultures" is the harmonious follow-up to its first album, 2004's appropriately titled "Out Of The Shadow." The album's folk tunes are accompanied by lyrics that ask some serious questions. With a charmingly moody tone and an inspirational underlying message, this go-around takes Rogue Wave to the next level.

## movies

BY VINCE COGLEY

**Batman Begins** (Deluxe Edition)

RATING: PG-13 • AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$30.95



Dark Knight fans who weren't turned off to the franchise after the awful "Batman & Robin" should breathe a sigh of relief at Director Christopher Nolan's ("Insomnia") return to a darker portrayal of the vigilante superhero. An astonishing side story is that Christian Bale ("American Psycho"), who stars as the Caped Crusader, rode the weight roller coaster from 121 pounds for his starring role in "The Machinist" back up to his normal 180 pounds for this role. Katie Holmes' performance is uninspiring, but Cillian Murphy ("Red Eye") plays a convincing maniacal Dr. Jonathan Crane and his alter-ego, The Scarecrow. Veterans Liam Neeson ("Schindler's List") and Morgan Freeman ("Driving Miss Daisy") turn in solid performances as expected.

**Star Wars, Episode III: Revenge of the Sith**

RATING: PG-13 • AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$29.98



We don't think we're catching anyone off guard by saying that Anakin Skywalker (played by Hayden Christensen of "Shattered Glass") becomes Darth Vader in the third installment of George Lucas' space opera. "Sith" is packed with pulse-pounding action scenes augmented with gorgeous computer-generated imagery. Set during the Clone War, the film chronicles Skywalker's fall from grace as he becomes one of the most notorious villains in pop culture. The typically talented Natalie Portman does what she can with a role Lucas reduced to window dressing, but Ian McDiarmid steals the show as Palpatine/Darth Sidious. You'll watch "Sith" for Darth Vader, but it's McDiarmid's master stroke that saves the movie from the two prequels' fates.

**The Wizard of Oz** (Three-Disc Collector's Edition)

RATING: G • AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$49.95



Dust off your copy of Pink Floyd's "Dark Side of the Moon" because this remastered edition of the 1939 classic has been reproduced with eye-popping improved video quality that should further accentuate the creepy correlation between Pink Floyd's album and the film itself. The Victor Fleming movie is timeless in its own right, but this collector's edition is chock full of extras that make DVD aficionados salivate.

With available Dolby Digital 5.1, which will put your home theater system to work, the DVD also contains music-only and original mono audio tracks. Disc two is loaded with documentaries and TV specials, outtakes, deleted scenes, and stills galleries; disc three has an eclectic collection of shorts. In this age when big-budget films are the norm, "The Wizard of Oz" is a breath of fresh air for your next family movie night.

**Other Noteworthy Releases****Titanic** (Special Collector's Edition)

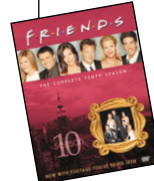
RATING: PG-13 • AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$29.99



James Cameron's ("Terminator 2: Judgment Day") romantic epic that provokes tears from both sexes (albeit typically for different reasons) receives royal treatment with this new edition. With an alternate ending, 29 never-before-seen deleted scenes, and commentary from Kate Winslet (among others), longtime "Titanic" fans should be pleased with this release.

**Friends - The Complete Tenth Season**

RATING: TV-14 • AVAILABLE: NOW • PRICE: \$44.98



For 10 years, "Friends" had us glued to the set every Thursday night. The last season showed that our six favorite quirky coeds still had a little magic left when the show ran its course. The DVD contains every episode of the last season, a 45-minute gag reel, audio commentary, and bonus footage.

**The Polar Express**

RATING: G • AVAILABLE: NOV 22 • PRICE: \$28.95



Pulling into station in the nick of time for the holiday season, "The Polar Express" used "performance capture" to convert live performances into disturbingly lifelike, digitally animated characters. Whether the animation detracts from the adaptation of Chris Van Allsburg's lush story, the film is certainly a visual feast for the eyes. Robert Zemeckis ("Back to the Future," "Forrest Gump," "Cast Away") directs

and keeps his reliable favorite Tom Hanks' ("Philadelphia," "Forrest Gump," "Saving Private Ryan") hands full with five roles. The story itself is ideal for children who are nearing their twilight years for believing in Santa Claus but also gives adults a satisfying message about the spirit of Christmas. The DVD itself has two menu challenges to provide a little extra entertainment for younger audiences.



# games

for you and the people in your life

BY VINCE COGLEY

## Guitar Hero

• PRICE: \$79.99



PlayStation 2

RedOctane's *Guitar Hero* is one of those innovative games that typically flies under the radar. This is *the* game for any musician who's dreamed of sharing the stage with Hendrix, Slash, or any other prolific guitar legend. Using a specially-designed guitar controller (included), you start with humble venues such as small clubs and dive bars. But if you rock enough socks off, you'll be playing sold-out arenas before you can say "whammy bar." *Guitar Hero* features head-banging songs from Audioslave, Franz Ferdinand, and more.

• RED OCTANE • [WWW.GUITARHEROGAME.COM](http://WWW.GUITARHEROGAME.COM)

## Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories

• PRICE: \$49.99



Playstation  
Portable

When a new console debuts, you usually have to wait a short while before the first console-defining game arrives, and *GTA: Liberty City Stories* is one of those games. Say what you will about the "Hot Coffee" controversy, this edition should definitely please longtime fans of the series. *GTA: Liberty City Stories* returns to Liberty City, the metropolis that started the phenomenon, and follows the story of ex-mobster Toni Cipriani as he attempts to clean up the city's ruthless underworld.

• ROCKSTAR GAMES

• [WWW.ROCKSTARGAMES.COM/LIBERTYCITYSTORIES](http://WWW.ROCKSTARGAMES.COM/LIBERTYCITYSTORIES)

## Project Gotham Racing 3

• PRICE: \$49.99



XBox 360

*Project Gotham Racing 3* is a launch title for the Xbox 360 and should easily assume the mantle of most visually dazzling racing game. Perfect for anyone who's ever been stuck behind the guy going 59mph in the passing lane, *Project Gotham Racing 3* puts you in the driver's seat of some of the world's fastest cars. Add an HDTV and Dolby 5.1 surround sound system, and you'll forget you're playing a video game.

• MICROSOFT • [WWW.MICROSOFT.COM](http://WWW.MICROSOFT.COM)

### Epson StoryTeller Photo Book Creator

• [WWW.EPSON.COM](http://WWW.EPSON.COM) • PRICE: \$19.99 TO \$29.99

We'd all love to scrapbook those special moments in our lives, but who has the time? Actually, anyone does with Epson's remarkable StoryTeller kit ([www.epson.com](http://www.epson.com)). Use the drag-and-drop Windows software to fit your digital photos into colorful templates and then print them out on the included sheets of inkjet photo paper. Bind them in the included hard album cover and printable



dust jacket, and you're done. Epson sells a 10-page, 5- x 7-inch kit for \$19.99, along with 8- x 10-inch kits with 10 pages (\$24.99) and 20 pages (\$29.99).

### Apricorn MicroKey

• [WWW.APRICORN.COM](http://WWW.APRICORN.COM) • PRICE: \$159.99



So who's the black hole in your life? You know, the well-meaning gadget lover that nevertheless kills every bit of electronics in record time? Here's the stocking stuffer for Mr. Bungle: Apricorn's crush-resistant MicroKey ([www.apricorn.com](http://www.apricorn.com)). This USB 2.0 memory key is fashioned of a tough aluminum alloy which, Apricorn claims, helps it to survive being dropped, stepped on, and sat on. The MicroKey comes in DVD-like capacities of 4GB (\$159), 6GB (\$199), and 8GB (price unavailable).

### Memory Ball Alarm Clock

• [WWW.UNCOMMONGOODS.COM](http://WWW.UNCOMMONGOODS.COM) • PRICE: \$60

Something about this unusual clock/radio makes us smile. To change preset radio stations, you roll the magnetic ball to different detents on the top. Totally pointless, of course, but undoubtedly fun. And with its compact, 5- x 5-inch dimensions and ability to run on batteries, the Memory Ball clock even travels well. If you're an unabashed "functional art" lover on your shopping list, take your \$60 and surf to [www.uncommongoods.com](http://www.uncommongoods.com).



# ... & gifts

on the lighter side of technology

BY MARTY SEMS



# what they're SAYIN

BY MRIDU KHULLAR

With online stores popping up all over the place, it's easier than ever to order a spunky new laptop, a shiny camera, or that most coveted digital camcorder with just a few clicks of the mouse. Is this convenience a more important factor when shopping for electronics, or do women still like taking a quick trip to the local retail store to get a good feel for a gadget? We asked four women; here's where they've been shopping.

## DEBORAH MYERS

BUSINESS WOMAN

Deborah Myers, a 31-year-old who works out of her home office in Wolcott, N.Y., is a freelance writer. Because her work requires her to have 24-hour availability for her editors and hard-to-reach interview subjects, Deborah simply cannot do without her LG Electronics 6000 cell phone, which acts as her business line. But that's not all that's dear to her. Her Nikon Coolpix 4500 digital camera is not only vital for her work, but it also gets her a bit of attention. "I've had interview subjects from Hillary Clinton to Go Bong, a Korean Buddhist Monk, ooh and ahh about my digital camera and look it over," she says.

For her phones, Deborah goes to her local Radio Shack dealer, Galaxy Shop. "The store is about the size of my living room, and the people all know me by name," says Deborah. "But I don't go there just to support the hometown folks. When things have gone

wrong with my phone, they have given me a loaner for free. That won't happen with a Web-based or a large super-store." She bought her camera from OfficeDepot.com, though, because she can always get by without it for a while, and the big stores provide discounts that smaller stores couldn't possibly match.



## DEBRA SEIFERT

NEW EMPTY-NESTER

Debra Seifert, 50, works at a small public relations and advertising agency that specializes in serving technology clients.

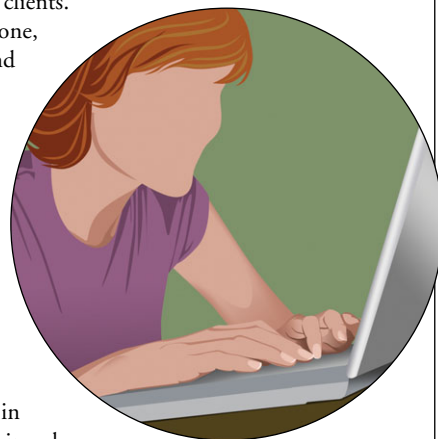
She has a wired phone, a mobile phone, and an Apple G4

Titanium laptop computer with Wi-Fi capabilities.

"I use my G4 laptop constantly," says Debra. "There is no life without it. There is certainly no job without it!"

She uses it to keep in touch with her son in college who uses AOL Instant Messenger to chat with her. She also uses her Samsung a670 cell phone to keep track of her boys.

When Debra or her sons need to buy new devices, they usually go to Fry's Electronics, which, according to her, is the best-of-the-best of electronics stores. However, she bought her younger son's PC online from Amazon.com, which is the only online retailer that she trusts for a big purchase. "I shop online when we know what we want," she says. "We go to Fry's when it seems too hard to pick something from a Web site."





## Where Do I Shop For CE Devices & Why?

### MEGAN ANGEL-RIEPENHOFF

#### YOUNG WOMAN

Megan Angel-Riepenhoff, 21, a former vet tech, quit her job last year to become a stay-at-home mom and pursue freelance writing and photography. Her gadget of choice is the Olympus C-8080

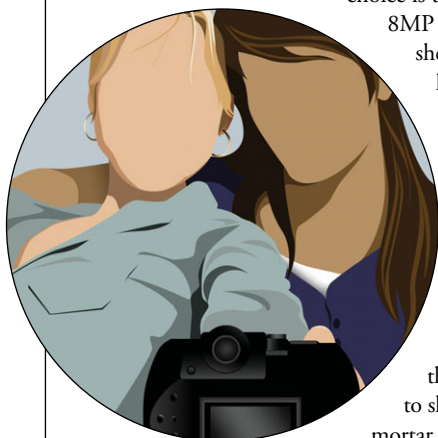
8MP digital camera, which she uses not only for her livelihood, but also for her entertainment.

Unless she's looking for something specific, Megan will go to Wal-Mart to compare CE devices because, as she says, "You just can't beat their prices." She prefers to shop at a brick-and-

mortar store when trying to

narrow her choices for two reasons: If she's going to spend more than a few hundred dollars on an item, she wants to be sure that she's getting it fresh off a factory line (unopened) with a warranty and that she can at least play around with it to make sure it works before she gets it home. However, she says, "If I am searching for something very particular, I tend to check eBay first." If Megan knows exactly what model she wants, she'll compare prices online and then decide if she wants to buy from an online reputable source or hunt down the items in person.

Next on Megan's wish list? "I think I'd have to go after a PSP with games; a 54-inch plasma screen television; a new BlackBerry that actually functions; business software; a camera phone that could stay charged longer than 15 minutes; a Sirius radio setup for the house, car, etc.; a dual-layered DVD burner; and another DSL network."



### AMY TIEMANN

#### MOTHER

When Amy Tiemann, 37, moved to North Carolina with her family and left the working world for three years, it created a significant identity crisis for her. She worked through her insecurities and reinvented herself as a writer, completing a young adult novel, "High Water," and writing "Mojo Mom: Nurturing Your Self While Raising a Family" to help other women through upheavals that motherhood brings.

Through the journey, she's been accompanied by her 6GB green iPod mini, which has enough capacity to let her download her favorite radio shows and music. Amy and members of her family also have the original 20GB iPod, a blue mini, the iPod photo, and a shuffle, and Amy has her eyes on the nano in the near future.

While her Apple gadgets have her running to her local Apple Store, she uses Amazon.com for everything else. "I am so used to shopping there for books that it is natural to buy everything I can buy from them," says Amy. She tends to shy away from other sites she doesn't know that well, though. "I have been burned buying a video camera from a discount electronics site. They had very poor consumer service, and the items arrived two weeks after the vacation we wanted to videotape." She feels that she can count on larger, tried-and-true sites not to rip her off.

Amy generally enjoys the convenience of shopping online so that she doesn't have to drive all over town. She says, "I'm very happy to have my purchases delivered directly to me!" And, she would definitely take blogging word of mouth into consideration when deciding on a purchase.



### CE Store Preferences



#### Deborah's Preferences

Radio Shack dealer called Galaxy Shop and OfficeDepot.com



#### Debra's Preferences

Fry's Electronics and Amazon.com



#### Megan's Preferences

Wal-Mart and eBay.com



#### Amy's Preferences

Apple Store and Amazon.com



# Win **Free** CE Gear With



## Lifestyles™

### No blushing allowed!

But this camera is so hot that it's hard not to. The Casio Elixim EX-S500 is a digital gem loaded with a 5MP resolution, antiblur technology, and 3X Optical Zoom. All this in a camera that's barely bigger than a credit card! It's almost too good to be true.

To enter CE Lifestyles' product giveaway, just go to [www.celifestyles.com/DecFreeGiveaway](http://www.celifestyles.com/DecFreeGiveaway) and sign up. Get online today for your chance to win! Offer expires: January 1, 2006

Check back often for more great giveaways from *CE Lifestyles* and our partners.



PRIVACY POLICY: *CE Lifestyles* does not sell, share, or trade subscriber personal information.

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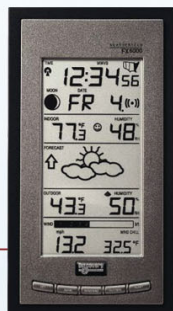
## Santa's Own Christmas List

We can't forget the big guy in red during the holidays! Santa needs some gifts, too. And what better gifts to give him than these cool CE devices to help him and his elves during their hectic holiday schedule?

**Radar/Laser Detector**  
\$329.95; [www.escortradar.com](http://www.escortradar.com)  
For when Santa is running late



**Wireless Weather Station**  
\$149.95; [www.shopping.discovery.com](http://www.shopping.discovery.com)  
The wind chill is frigid at those speeds!



**TomTom Bluetooth GPS Navigator 5**  
\$299.95; [www.tombom.com](http://www.tombom.com)  
Even Santa gets lost sometimes



**Portable Car Cooler/Warmer**  
\$47; [www.cetsolar.com](http://www.cetsolar.com)  
Keeps the soup hot and the soda cold

**Deluxe Heated Seat Cushion**  
\$29.95; [www.autosportcatalogue.com](http://www.autosportcatalogue.com)  
For a warm bum on cold nights



**Heated Smart Mug**  
\$24.95; [www.autosportcatalogue.com](http://www.autosportcatalogue.com)  
To keep the elves' cocoa hot



**12-Inch Portable DVD Player**  
\$999.99; [www.samsung.com](http://www.samsung.com)  
Hermy loves "A Christmas Story"



**Waterproof LED Flashlight**  
\$39.95; [www.shopping.discovery.com](http://www.shopping.discovery.com)  
For when the snow melts



**XM SKYFi2 Satellite Radio Receiver**  
\$99.99; [www.shopdelphi.com](http://www.shopdelphi.com)  
To drown out Rudolph singing his song

**Digital Map Distance Finder**  
\$19.95; [www.shopping.discovery.com](http://www.shopping.discovery.com)  
Santa loves his shortcuts



**Headset Walkie Talkies**  
\$14.99; [www.200toy.com](http://www.200toy.com)  
Santa has helpers everywhere down here



Graphics & Design By Andrea Schultz

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left side

right side

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